

**BENICIA OLD TOWN
THEATRE GROUP**

1996 — 2003



JAKE'S WOMEN

FALL 1996

JAKE'S WOMEN
by
NEIL SIMON
Opening Night: March 24, 1992
NEIL SIMON THEATRE
Originally Directed by GENE SAKS

Directed by
JOE De GUGLIELMO

Production Design by
DOUG HAM

Lighting Design by
DOUG HAM and ROB WOODS

Costume Design by
HOLLY O'HARA

Sound Design by
LARRY CLARK and 'GEORGE' GEORGES

Stage Manager
DAN CLARK

Photographer
DAWN DeFELICIA, ANGEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Billboards
MERNIE BUCHANAN, PRISM GRAPHICS

Catering
BARBARA'S CATERING AND DELI

Transportation and Carpenter
WALLY McCARTNEY

PRODUCTION CREW

Light Consul.....KAY HLAVKA
Sound Consul.....GINA URIARTE
Stage Hands.....VICKI MAFFEL, DEBBIE CONWAY, JOEL HART,
MARTIN LEON, PAT WYATT
Cashier.....NOALIE SHOTWELL
Set Construction
and Painting Crew.....WALLY McCARTNEY, DAVE MARKS, ED THOMAS,
JEREMY CLARK, DAN CLARK, DYANNE VOJVODA,
MARTIN LEON, SABRINA ESCOBOSA, STEVE
GOETZ, LARRY CLARK
House Managers.....SHANNON MARR, DAVE MARKS, STEVE WARANEITZ
WALLY McCARTNEY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Jake.....JOE GUISTINO
Maggie.....GINA ZITO
Karen.....LINDA BARRON
Molly (At 12).....KAYLYN PETERSON
Molly (At 21).....RENEE RODRIGUEZ
Edith.....JANICE ANDERSON
Julie.....SHERRIE GIBBS
Sheila.....CAROL DALY

TIME & PLACE

ACT ONE

Not too long ago
in Jake's apartment in a Manhattan neighborhood called SoHo
located south of Houston Street in New York City
and in his mind!

ACT TWO

About six months later....

There will be one 15-minute intermission

Use of flash photography or recording equipment is prohibited

Member: Theatre Bay Area, Benicia Chamber of Commerce, Arts
Benicia, Solano Arts Alliance, Benicia Arts Council, Vallejo Arts
Council.

SPECIAL THANKS

to the following Individuals and companies for their donations to help
BOTTG replace the recently stolen tools and equipment

Randy & Chris Barnum	KM'S Quality Word Processing
Ruth Coulson	Kathy Mattice
Gloria Council	Philip & Robin McMeen
Patrick M. Donaghue	William & Darlene Peterson
ECCO Engineering & Construction Co., Inc.	Gwyn Pyle
Ianet & Allen Grothe	Gerald & Judy Potter
Terry Hay	John & Janice Silva
Ronald Kohler	Ray Wong

'Jake's Women': darker side of Simon

FAR FROM SIMPLE — Neil Simon is a super-smart man, and he knows all too well what it is to suffer. His first wife died and a second marriage didn't work out. But he managed to recover and keep going.

He may have found some solace on a couch in a therapist's office, but he also poured out his woes in his plays. And, as a past master of the art of making audiences laugh, he made tons of money at the same time.

"Jake's Women," Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current attraction, has a cast of eight. Jake (Joe Guistino) draws the undivided attention of seven women, some of whom visit him in his sleek Manhattan apartment, and others of whom he sees and hears only in his mind.

Jake (forgive me if I slip and call him Neil), a playwright who "loves" too many women, is in the doldrums. His marriage to Maggie (Gina Zito) is shaky, and he still grieves for Julie (Sherrie Gibbs), his long-dead first wife. Also tightly meshed in his life are his chipper sister, Karen (Linda Barron, longtime company actress), Edith, his shrewd psychiatrist (Janice Anderson), Molly, his daughter at ages 12 and 21 (Kaylyn Peterson and Renee Rodriguez) and Sheila, the most recent of his many girlfriends (Carol Daly).

It is smartly cast and directed by Joe De Guglielmo, but "Jake's Women" is a hard show to do. It includes the wit for which Simon is famous, but it also has a darker side. I found it hard to drum up much sympathy for Guistino's perceptively etched selfish and egotistical Jake. But my heart went out to the long-suffering women who stood by him so loyally.

The company, the longest-running dinner theater in Northern California, suffered a cruel blow in September when thieves broke into its scene shop. Stage manager Dan Clark says, "They ripped through a steel door and took all the tools we've collected in 33 years — power saws, hammers, nails and screws — about \$8,000 of equipment. Then just last week thieves got in and stole all our makeup and four cases of beer."



ON THE
AISLE
Maggie Crum

But the show goes on. Performances are scheduled through Nov. 16, with dinner shows on Saturdays, at BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia. Call 1-707-746-1269.



JOE GUISTINO as Jake gets lots of attention from women in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "Jake's Women."

'Jake's Women' continuing at Benicia theater

Joe Guistino stars as Jake in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of the Neil Simon comedy "Jake's Women."

The play continues tonight through Nov. 16 at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia. Doors open at 7 p.m. for Friday cocktail shows with an 8 p.m. curtain. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for Saturday dinner shows, also with an 8 p.m. curtain time. Show-only tickets are \$12, dinner shows are \$25.



The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Jake's Women" continues through Nov. 16.

Imagination runs wild in BOTTG's 'Jake's Women'



GINA ZITO and JOE GUISTANO

By Stewart Applin
Times-Herald staff writer

BENICIA — Americans are most familiar with Neil Simon's early efforts, such as popular Broadway plays and movies as "Barefoot in the Park" and "The Odd Couple." A later comedy, more straightforwardly autobiographical and introspective, is the current project of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

"Jake's Women," a 1992 Simon effort, is the fall presentation of the BOTTG. The play will be performed weekends through Nov. 16.

Jake, a 53-year-old New York City writer and his wife, Maggie, have been married eight years. They are having marital difficulties. Jake is so wrapped up in his writing that he hardly listens to Maggie. Part of the problem is that Jake's first wife, Julie, died in an automobile accident at age 35, and he still spends much of his waking hours thinking about her.

The 60-year-old Simon did in fact lose his first wife, Jean Simon, who died of breast cancer at age 40 in 1978. He has been married three times since, twice to the same woman.

"Jake's Women" uses the literary device of

having Jake's imaginings take human form on the stage. These imaginary but embodied women debate with Jake about the direction his life is taking, sometimes interacting in humorous ways with other imaginary women and those actual women from Jake's present as well.

Although "Jake's Women" has a darker and more introspective ambience than earlier Simon hits, it still contains the sophisticated comedy and trademark Simon one-liners.

Seven actresses portray the six women in Jake's life (one character is depicted at age 12 and at age 21). Gina Zito, a 23-year veteran for BOTTG, plays Maggie. Ironically, Zito brings good comic timing to a character who has no sense of humor. Benicia resident Linda Barron is Jake's sister, Karen, and Sherrie Gibbs is Jake's first wife, Julie. Janice Anderson plays Jake's therapist, Edith. Kaylyn Peterson, an eighth grader at Benicia Middle School, is making her debut in a dramatic comedy as Molly, Jake's daughter, at age 12, and Renee Rodriguez portrays Molly at age 21.

One particular funny scene in Act 2 had Joe Guistano as Jake playing against Zito (in his imagination) and Carol Daly (Jake's girlfriend

who is visiting him) in a (true comedy of errors).

Guistano, who has performed in several plays for the BOTTG, achieves a tour de force as Jake. Alternately reciting monologues to the audience and long dialogues with other characters (those he imagines and those actually in his life), Guistano is on stage all but a few seconds during the two-hour production. He assumes a Rodney Dangerfield persona in his performance as Jake, wondering why he gets no respect from the women in his life and why it has been so difficult for him to be intimate with a woman.

Director Joe De Guglielmo has put together a fast-paced play with rapid fire humor. One funny rejoinder is barely out someone's mouth when another is on the way.

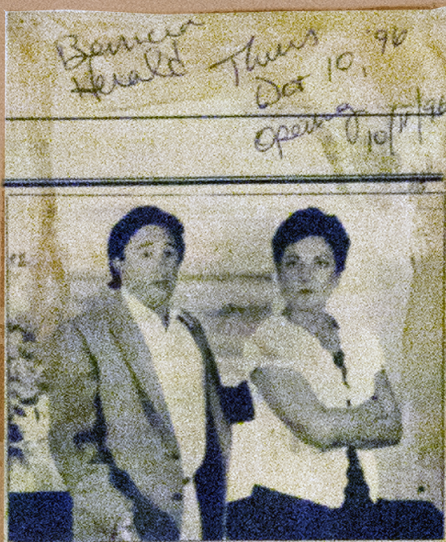
Set designer Doug Ham, who has worked for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group since 1979, has designed a minimalist set, some furniture and a word processor, that properly

focuses attention on the dialogue and relationships of the play. Ham and Rob Woods collaborate on the lights. The lighting scheme helps the audience know when the characters on stage with Jake are real or from his imagination.

A dinner of bread of chicken and vegetarian lasagna, salad and dessert provided by Barbara's Catering and Deli of Benicia preceded the performance.

It's too bad that a performance of this quality didn't attract a larger crowd on Saturday night. However, residents of Benicia and Vallejo will have 12 more opportunities during the next four weeks to see this adult comedy.

Hint: Don't bring the kids.



BOTTG's Neil Simon's "Jake's Women" stars Joe Guistano as Jake and Gina Zito and Maggie. The show opens Friday at the B.O.T.T.G. Hall. Tickets are available at 745-1269.

BOTTG presents Neil Simon's "Jake's Women"

On Friday Oct. 11, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will open its fall production, "Jake's Women," by Neil Simon. Simon has entertained millions of theatergoers with his well-known comedies. However, this is not the typical light comedy which we associate with Neil Simon. "Jake's Women" is a play that reached Broadway in 1992 for a very short run. It soon became clear, however, that this play shows a deeper, more thought-provoking aspect of Simon's playwriting than his earlier comedies.

The main character in "Jake's Women" is a successful playwright, accustomed to creating intricate dialogues in his mind. Although the action in this play takes place only in Jake's apartment, we are often transported to scenes within Jake's mind of his past experiences with key women in his life, and the effect they had on him. During the play we meet his wife, his daughter, his therapist, and his sister, both in Jake's apartment, and in Jake's memory. As his second marriage begins to crumble, these female "characters" take on a life of their own. They interrupt the real life events taking place in Jake's apartment with uncomfortable perceptive observations about his life.

Joe De Guglielmo, the director of BOTTG's production of "Jake's Women," says that the intriguing aspect of watching "Jake's Women" is that one is not always clear what is really happening in Jake's apartment and what is happening in Jake's mind. It is this fluidity of time, thought, and reality, which makes "Jake's Women" such an interesting evening of theater.

De Guglielmo believes that Jake is the first of any of Neil Simon's main characters to turn the mirror on himself and to look at his own life. He adds, however, that "Jake's Women" is continuing with Neil Simon's unique humor, and though it is a more poignant comedy, it is still full of laughs. De Guglielmo is the theater director at Santa Rosa Junior College. He has a B.A. from Harvard and an M.F.A. from the University of California. He has directed plays at Los Angeles, New York and the Bay Area, including a highly received production of "The Odd Couple" at the Mission Street Theater in San Francisco.

Rick Ernst, President of the theater group, explains, "Despite the fact that we are a small group, and our budget is limited, we are proud of the quality of

years, the ARTY Award winning Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is proceeding with the production and we extend our patrons to COME ENJOY LIVE THEATRE FOR THE FIRST TIME AGAIN! At the Benicia Old Town Theatre, now in our 33rd Season, our live audiences make every performance unique and enjoyable!"

"We have received many generous donations to help purchase new tools and building supplies," Ernst said, "and the show will go on. However, we truly need our audiences to return to our theater to see that we continue to produce professional plays. Our volunteers are doing their utmost to make the evening enjoyable and entertaining. Live theater provides a break from the other entertainment media such as television, videotape rentals, and movies."

"We are trying hard to increase our audience and making changes that will be attractive to our patrons. BOTTG is the longest running Dinner Theatre in the Bay Area, and has contracted with a new catering company that has created a new and delicious dinner menu which has generated many compliments."

"We have reduced GROUP PRICES so that the coordinator of a group of 10 or more is admitted free, and each member of the group can enjoy the show for only \$16." Call Belinda Smith at (707) 745-4675 for details.

The cast includes Joe Guistano (Jake), Gina Zito (Maggie), Linda Barron (Karen), and Kaylyn Peterson (Molly) at age 12 of Benicia, Carol Daly (Edith) of Discovery Bay, Janice Anderson (Edith) of Pleasant Hill, Sherrie Gibbs of San Ramon, and Renee Rodriguez (Molly) at age 21 of Pacheco.

Performances run Oct. 11 through Nov. 16 with shows on Friday and Saturday evenings with two Sunday matinees Oct. 27 and Nov. 3. Prices are \$12 for the show only, and only \$25 for the dinner and show package, with special rates for seniors and students and season ticket holders. For season tickets, please contact Pat Wyatt at (707) 745-1269.

The B.O.T.T.G. Hall is located at 145 West 3 St. in Benicia. For reservations call (707) 745-1269.

Introspective Simon play packed with emotion

By Daniel C. Smith
Staff writer

BENICIA — "I can't believe," the lead character mutters, "I'm having a conversation with myself and I'm losing the argument."

Similarly, people seeing Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's new production of "Jake's Women" may have trouble believing this is a Neil Simon play. Simon, the Bard of Broadway's doing fantasy?

Fantasy it is, though, packed with Simon's trademark punchlines but also with both surreal wit and gut-wrenching emotion.

The four-year-old play contains some of the most serious and introspective scenes Simon has ever written, and the fact that most of the action takes place in the protagonist's imagination puts an extraordinary burden on the actor playing Jake.

Community theater veteran Joe Guistano carried this burden with pathos and his usual excellent comic timing on opening night Friday. He lapsed a scarce few times with stumbles or distracted delivery, but for the most part, did a superb job in a difficult role.

Jake is a widowed playwright whose second wife is busy "climbing the corporate ladder" and having an affair. She tells Jake she needs time away, but we learn by late in the first act that Jake's inability to shelve the memory of his first wife is one impetus for her departure.

Guistano is the only male in the play, but the main subject is how he interacts with the various women in his life and memories. Simon challenges the audience to figure out whether each of the women is real or remembered, and leaves sufficient clues "to lead people through" Jake's intricate fantasies.

Gina Zito is fine as the second wife, successfully portraying both her exasperation with the marriage and the despatch opportunity to hunt her husband's imagination once she leaves him.

Even better are a couple of the

See JAKE, page 2C.

JAKE

From page 1C

supporting players, Janice Anderson of Pleasant Hill as Jake's therapist Edith and Renee Rodriguez of Pacheco as the young adult daughter from his first marriage.

Anderson is perhaps the best at highlighting the irony of Jake's fantasies, while Rodriguez dramatically compels him to set up a meeting between her and her late mother in a particularly surreal culminating scene.

Other cast members include Car-

ol Daly of Discovery Bay as Jake's new flame, Kaylyn Peterson as his daughter at 12, Sherrie Gibbs of San Ramon as his first wife, and Linda Barron of Benicia.

The future bodes well for what is reputedly the longest-running dinner theater in the Bay Area, though, with the introduction of Joe De Guglielmo as director of this show, De Guglielmo cast well and set a happy but not overly confusing pace for his first Benicia show.

Neil Simon's Hit Comedy



JAKE'S WOMEN

PRODUCTION BOARD and their production responsibilities

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DAVE MARKS, Vice-President	Set Construction, Painting Crew
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THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Down DePellecca, Mervie Buchanan, Noelle Sherwell, Debbie Conway, Judy Foster, Rita Kennedy, David Sells, Lucky Sells, Janis Sells, Vicki Maffei, Lillian and Ed Thomas, Leslye Avera, Chris Barnum, Stephanie Barnum, Shaun Carroll, Linda Crawford, Roger and Janice Davis, Mike and Lillian Downing, Barbara Fugate, Arthur Hermann, Martin Levin, Shannon Marr, Anne Mason, Alma McCartney, Barbara McFadden, Judy Reisinger, Kristy Reisinger, Jack and Liz Robins, and Steve Waranetz.

Once again, WALLY MCCARTNEY, LARRY CLARK, ED THOMAS, ROB WOOD, DAVE MARKS, and DAN CLARK have gone above and beyond the call of duty and helped us produce this play. Without their devotion and hard work, this show would not be possible.

The Kevin McCall Day Volunteers were Donna Welch, Dan Clark, Dyanne Vojvoda, Martin Levin, Sabrina Escobedo, Kay Hlavka, and Jim Donaldson. Again, we thank ADOBE HOUSE for inviting us to participate in this special event.

Special thanks to the ADOBE HOUSE for donating the use of the ADOBE THRIFT STORE where we could rehearse our show.

Program Expenses were provided by The NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION in honor of member BILL CAWLEY, owner of BENICIA PLUMBING, who was recently installed as Treasurer of the Executive Board of MCA.

BOTTG NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Along with the need for donations for power tools and Makinas, we need additional chairs, theatre lights, a computer, a computer printer, a workshop, and a truck. All donations are tax deductible.

PRESIDENT'S GREETING

We have asked our fellow Benicians to "Come Enjoy Live Theatre For The First Time.... Again." And you have responded by coming out to see the wonderful and hard work we have done to produce yet another play for our loyal patrons. We invite you to come to our monthly meetings and to become involved in our productions, either on stage, back stage, or as a volunteer in our theatre. Please contact me at my home 745-8879, and we can chat about what you might like to do with us.

I also encourage you to call me and tell me about what you like, or don't like about our productions. It is your feedback and suggestions that keep us growing and changing and improving our productions. Contact me by mail at P.O. Box 602, Benicia, CA 94510 or call me at 745-8879.

Watch for our Children's Talent Show, our TOAST TO THE ARTS fund raising event, and cheer for us when we participate in the July 3rd Torchlight Parade. Please come to our wonderful entertaining production of THE FANTASTICS coming this Spring.

Until I see you again, I am...

Sincerely yours,

Rick Ernst

Benicia theater impressive

After living in Benicia for six years, we finally went to see a production by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. We were so impressed by the quality of the show that we went down what took us so long.

"Jake's Women" by Neil Simon is a wonderful comedy that will keep you in stitches. In our opinion, the actor who plays Jake is the best we have ever seen. He plays Jake so well that we were in the theater above and the food was delicious. We highly recommend this show to anyone who enjoys an evening of great entertainment. Please support this highly talented theater group.

Sandra and Michael Escobedo

Benicia

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS SPRING, 1996



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
Left to right:
Plant
Laura Goodman ("Audrey")
Shawn Carroll ("Beynour")



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
"AUDREY II" PLANT



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
Richard Howarter ("Orrin")
Laura Goodman ("Audrey")



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
Top left to right:
Lisa Anne Shepard ("Bonette")
Monica Gomez ("Crystal")
Crystal Hayes ("Cliffon")
Bottom left to right:
Laura Goodman ("Audrey")
Shawn Carroll ("Beynour")
Richard Howarter ("Orrin")



Richard Howarter ("Orrin")
Laura Goodman ("Audrey")



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
Top, left to right:
Lisa Anne Shepard ("Bonette")
Kristel Hayes ("Cliffon")
Monica Gomez ("Crystal")
Richard Howarter ("Orrin")
Sitting:
Laura Goodman ("Audrey")
Shawn Carroll ("Beynour")



Left to right:
Robert Dunlop as
"Mr. Muehrnik"
and
Shawn Carroll "Beynour"



"LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS"
Left to right:
Richard Howarter ("Orrin")
Shawn Carroll ("Beynour")



Laura Goodman plays 'Audrey,' while Shaun Carroll plays 'Seymour' in The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of 'Little Shop of Horrors.'

'LITTLE SHOP' LOADED WITH BIG FUN

By Stewart Applin
Times Herald staff writer

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of *Little Shop of Horrors* displays a sure-handed professionalism that would be the envy of many acting troupes in other small cities in the United States.

Director and choreographer John Leonard, musical direc-

REVIEW

tor Kristy Ju-lane and the nine actors and actresses have turned this tale of a homicidal plant in a skid row flower shop into a fun mixture of comedy and music with just a dash of horror.

The musical is a great treat for children and adults, even if many of the 1950s allusions — such as Donna Reed and Howdy Doody — may go over the heads of some of the under-30 crowd.

Laura Goodman, known primarily as a dancer and choreographer earlier in her career, displayed a good singing voice in the role of Audrey, who could be most charitably described as a naive, wide-eyed late 1950s-early 1960s blonde who sells flowers in the store. Her voice was shown to best effect in the song "Somewhere That's Green," a satiric ballad describing her conventional material-

The musical is a great treat for children and adults, even if many of the 1950s allusions . . . may go over the heads of some of the under-30 crowd.

istic goals right from the pages of *Better Homes & Gardens*.

Although he does not possess the singing excellence of his colleagues, Benician Shaun Carroll played well the character of whiny-voiced klutz Seymour, whose glasses are in great need of repair. Seymour is the person who raises the infamous plant and who first notices its strange proclivities.

Richard Howarter made an impressive debut with the BOITG, playing six roles in the musical. The major part was Orrin, the sadistic, black-leather-jacketed dentist. Howarter also played a customer, a journalist, agent and Mrs. Luce.

Also making his debut with the BOITG was Robert Dunlop. Dunlop portrayed Mushnik, the owner of flower shop and the long-patient victim of Seymour's shenanigans. Dunlop managed both a hilarious Yiddish accent and good singing voice.

The trio of Monica Gomez, Kris-

tel Hayes and Lisa Anne Shepard played what amounted to the Greek chorus in the musical, commenting with song and dance on the proceedings on the stage. Aided by Leonard's choreography and the musical direction of Julianio, the three kept audience members laughing at the satiric lyrics of such songs as the "Little Shop of Horrors" and "Da-Doo."

Unseen until after the conclusion of the play but the object of well-deserved applause were Lorn Heller and Christopher Strawbridge. Heller did the movements for the man-eating plant Audrey II, which grew ever larger as the play progressed. Strawbridge, a Vallejo resident, provided the voice.

Barbara's Catering and Deli of Benicia prepared the ample dinner before the play on Saturday night. The dinner consisted of marinated roast pork, pasta primavera, red potatoes, green beans and salad bar with chesecake for dessert.

Little Shop of Horrors was based on a 1960 black and white film — a campy mélange of comedy, horror and a parody of the *Dragnet* television series — directed and produced by Roger Corman. Charles Griffith wrote the screenplay. The movie became part of Hollywood lore because it was filmed in just two days. Twenty-two-year-old Jack Nicholson had a bit part in the movie, playing the masochist Wilbur Force who had the famous line, "No novocaine. It dulls the senses."

The Corman film was the basis for an off-Broadway stage musical with lyrics by Howard Ashman and music by Alan Menken. The stage musical moved the locale from Los Angeles to New York City. It led to a 1986 movie directed by Frank Oz, starring Rick Moranis, Ellen Greene, Joseph Garmata and Steve Martin.

Little Shop of Horrors will be performed on Friday and Saturday evenings through May 11 at 8 p.m. Two Sunday matinees are scheduled for April 21 and 28 at 4 p.m. Friday and Sunday performances are \$12 for adults and \$11 for seniors. Saturday dinner theatre performances are \$25. The performances are at the BDES Hall, 149 West J St., Benicia. For reservations, call 746-1208.



Lisa Anne Shepard as
"Ronette"
Monica Gomez ("Crystal")
Kristel Hayes ("Chiffon")



Richard Howarter ("Orrin")
Shaun Carroll ("Seymour")



Lisa Anne Shepard
("Ronette")
Kristel Hayes ("Chiffon")

The Fantasticks

Spring, 1997



Andrew Pettit	(Walnut Creek)	The Mute
John Blytt	(Pleasant Hill)	Henry
Nick Dothee	(Martinez)	Matt
Richard Howarter	(Concord)	El Gallo
Doug Brown	(Alamo)	Bellomy



The ARTY Award Winning
Benicia Old Town
Theatre Group
proudly presents
Our Spring, 1997
production

Now in our 33rd Season

The longest running musical in history.....



....real love happens when youthful illusions
give way to reality

BOOK & LYRICS

By

TOM JONES

Now Entering its 37th Year at The Sullivan Street Theatre in New York

directed by
DAVID ROSTER

MUSIC

By

HARVEY SCHMIDT

musical direction by
KRISTY JULIANO

production design and technical direction by
DOUG HAM

Our show is dedicated to the memory of our
dear friends and fellow thespians
Adam LaZarre and Norm Gonsalves, Jr.

THE TIMES - FRIDAY, APRIL 23, 1997
LOCAL THEATER

'Fantasticks' is in fine form in Benicia

A PHENOMENON — Times have changed radically since Tim Jones and Harvey Schmidt's phenomenally successful "The Fantasticks" opened in 1960. In addition to such timeless songs as "Try to Remember" and "Soon It's Gonna Rain," the offbeat humor and vision that made the musical now projects a touching, youthful innocence that would seem to be lost and gone for ever.

Under David Roster's practical direction, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production at the ARTS Hall on Sison 1 Street gets off to an exuberant opening that leads into the story of the two-age lovers who learn that they must "let a little" before they grow up.

Perfectly cast in the leading roles of Luisa and Matt are Martina DeCeney and Nick Dothee. High school students with appealing voices, they give polished performances that reflect their experience and training.

Matt and Luisa's hotheaded plotting fathers (Steve Varnstrom and Doug Brown) think the kids are an ideal match, but they pretend to disapprove. All too soon, however, the fathers, both odd gardeners, realize that "if you plant a radish, you get a radish" but it's almost impossible to predict what your children will do.

El Gallo (drawn with a wonderfully gossamer touch by agile Richard Howarter) serves as the dead ex machina, who wields a magic wand and has a lot of common sense. Adding to the fantasy are the giggling Old Actor (John Blytt) and the irrepressible Mortimer (Suzanne Eugene), who pop out of a trunk and put on a show.

Traditionally, the all-important garden wall divides the families. In Roster's production, the Mute, usually portrayed by a woman as an internal apologetic, serves as the wall. Andrew Pettit handles the role with mischievous flair, but the original interpretation is more effective.

The recorded music — featuring the skills of Kristy Juliano, Joe Spradell, Derek Jones, Barbara Tait and Kate Bingham — works very well in the company's makeshift Theatre. Doug Ham's effective set and Dianne Marks and Shosh Carroll's imaginative costumes add to the fun.

"The Fantasticks," which has been running since 1960 in New York, is 37 years old. At the world-famous Broadway Theatre, it's still running strong.



MAGGIE CRUM
On the stage

"THE FANTASTICKS" is now in Benicia and is still going strong in New York — after 37 years.

21,000 productions and still retains its fresh appeal.

The Benicia production (including dinner on Saturday nights) runs through May 21. Call 4-705-746-1200.



Fantasticks is just that

A few changes here and there, but still a magical show

By Marilyn McElhaney
Times Herald correspondent

No other show — on or off Broadway — has ever approached "The Fantasticks" phenomenal 37-year run in New York.

The world's longest running musical is now playing at Benicia Old Town Theatre.

Music by Harvey Schmidt and lyrics by Tom Jones give this musical its endearing appeal. Songs like "Try to Remember" and "Soon It's Gonna Rain" have become part of the American culture.

With more than 11,000 productions, "The Fantasticks" is also the world's most frequent-

ly produced musical.

This show celebrates the innocence and idealism of young love.

Whether the liberties taken by BOTTG Director David Roster are to be celebrated is debatable.

Traditionally, the only female in the cast is the ingenue, Luisa Roster has cast a woman in the role of Mortimer, the Indian. While it adds some sexual humor, nuances are changed.

As a prelude, Roster has the cast walk up the center aisle, talking loudly and striking poses, a different approach that is not particularly effective.

accompaniment is more effective in this hall than live music.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has assembled a marvelous cast for this production.

Marissa DeClercq, 17, and Nick Dothee, 18, bring a strong stage presence to their roles. The young lovers express their affection with tenderness. Both DeClercq and Dothee have clear pure singing voices and their solos are excellent.

Steve Waranietz of Vallejo and Doug Brown bring warmth and humor to their roles as the fathers.

Knowing how teen-agers would react to any thought of

an arranged marriage, the couple's fathers pretend to feud and build a wall between their yards.

Wearing a coat with bricks painted on it, Andrew Pettit plays the wall. Though he has no lines, he makes his presence felt through dancing and exaggerated body language.

Costumed in a black cape, satin shirt and plumed hat, Richard Howarter makes a dramatic presence as El Gallo, the worldly bandit. In a powerful duet, "Beyond That Road," Howarter and Dothee sing about their experiences with life.

BOTTG's 'Fantasticks' a fine, mellow piece

Solid ensemble girds winsome musical

By Richard Hammer
Feature Writer

What hasn't been written or said about "The Fantasticks" after 27 years in continuous performance, the longest running musical in history?

There are good reasons for its longevity: a universal and tender story about young love and the passing of time.

Music by Harvey Schmidt and clever, sometimes heart strings-pulling lyrics and book by Tom Jones.

"Try to Remember," which opens and closes this two-hour play with music, ranks as one of the most beloved tunes ever to hail from Broadway.

Whether on or off Broadway — wherever this little slice of life, sweet-hearted idyll is performed.

"The Fantasticks" is still being performed at New York City's Sullivan Theater, and, thankfully this spring in Benicia, too, a splendid version cobbled together by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

It continues at the historic B.O.T.T.G. Hall, 140 West J St., through May 17.

With some capable help from musical director Kristy Julliano, director David Roster competently directs this expressive, 13-song show.

Arguably, it directs itself and does so more appealingly in Act I than Act II, which suffers from predictability, i.e., pre-arranged husband returns home, only to be challenged by an unforgiving world.

The piece charms from the outset. Roster has the eight-member cast of area theater

veterans enter the hall from the rear, the audience facing the stage. Talking loudly in what seems momentarily like gibberish, the actors greet patrons at their tables, smiling ear to ear, glad handing. It's an endearing device, as catchy as Doug Hans' unaffected set, a wooden deck, where most of the action occurs, built in front of a large steamer trunk flanked by two ladders against the back stage.

Richard Howarter, as the black and red caped quasi-narrator and singer El Gallo, kicks off things with "Try to Remember."

Wrapped with his smooth baritone, the song resonates: "Try to remember the kind of September when love was young and oh so mellow."

Afterward, the basic story-line unfolds. Two stage fathers and neighbors, Bellamy and Hucklebee, portrayed ably by Doug Brown and Steve Waranietz, respectively, are busy matching up a son and daughter, Matt and Luisa.

Nick Dothee's depiction of Matt is as successfully acted (especially in a mock sword fight to thwart a rape) as it is sung in a sweet tenor, never more so than on "Metaphor."

He is matched, in vocal and acting skills, by Marissa DeClercq's Luisa.

Andrew Pettit as the Mute (doubling as a symbolic Wall), Suzanne Jean Bagnio, as Mortimer, and John Hyatt, as the Shakespeare-quoting Old Actor, leavened this winsome musical with welcome humor.

THE FACTS

THE FANTASTICKS

BOTTG
B.O.T.T.G. Hall, 140 West J St.
Benicia

Through May 17

\$17

746-1269



Benicia offers smiles in the form of 'Fantasticks'

By DANIEL C. SMITH
Staff writer

BENICIA — For its final production of a difficult 1996-97 season, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has resurrected a dusty classic of the wedge-nudge, wink-wink school of musical comedy with a satisfying production of "The Fantasticks."

The show is not only the world's longest running musical by virtue of its ongoing, 37-year engagement off-Broadway, but also the most frequently produced, with 11,000 productions so far in 89 countries.

BOTTG's version of the show features several enjoyable performances and a couple of promising young talents, anchored by local theater veteran Richard Howarter's portrayal of the scheming El Gallo.

The show is a slightly dated but campy spoof of romantic theater, with El Gallo helping two fathers make a match between their off-spring. One example of the show's age is the casual use of the word "rape," which the program hastens to explain is intended to mean "seduce and carry off."

Howarter began Sunday's not-so-perfect performance on a strong note, showing good musical voice in "Try to Remember" then doubling as a member when he sampled an audience member's drink after a staged sword fight.

REVIEW

Who: Old Town Theatre Group

What: "The Fantasticks"

Where: B.O.T.T.G. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia

When: 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays through May 17; 4 p.m. April 27 and May 4

How much: \$25 for dinner shows; \$12 for matinees and cocktail shows; discounts for seniors and children

Call: 1-707-746-1269

Steve Waranietz of Vallejo turns in a fine comic performance as Hucklebee, one of the pompous fathers, although his singing is only fair.

Alternatively, Doug Brown of Alamo as the other father seemed to have a fine singing voice, but did not project or ham it up enough to get everything out of his role.

The young couple, played by Marissa DeClercq of Concord and Nick Dothee of Martinez, both have excellent melodic range and bring the requisite ingenuity to their roles.

DeClercq was amusing in her teen-age self-absorption on "Much More," and Dothee was likewise



BENICIA Old Town Theatre Group performs "The Fantasticks."

laughable in his second-act declaration, "I've decided to be bad!" One can imagine, however, that both will get better with the power and savvy that maturity will bring to their skills.

John Hyatt of Pleasant Hill, Suzanne Jean Bagnio of Martinez and

Fantasticks

FROM PAGE C1

den wall, his hips sway in time "Never Say No."

As in most community theater, if production is not without its warts, BOTTG's second-act curtain as a Nazi-style stormtrooper was a bit up to BOTTG's usual standards, as the "waving" spotlight on "Much More" may have been distracting, but ultimately was a distraction.

Director David Roster of Oakland has assembled a mostly cost-effective production, though, with players to look and act their parts, we Howarter's wit and professionalism seems to steady the other performers, and the renewed score conducted by Kristy Julliano never misses a beat.

Theatergoers who expect a plot of surprises or intrigues may not be satisfied with this show, as it is primarily a takeoff on the traditional boy-meets-girl scenario. The songs by playwright Tom Jones and composer Harvey Schmidt, however, are clever, tender and the real strength of the show.

BOTTG is completing a season which two members died and if company was burglarized of all kinds. The troupe is undoubtedly grateful at having survived 1996, and this is a show that can help usher in the most delicate of years.

PRODUCTION BOARD (and their production responsibilities)

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TOAST TO THE ARTS

You are invited to enjoy "An afternoon of distinctive wines and culinary treats" at the 6th Annual TOAST TO THE ARTS coming Saturday, July 12th, here at the Historic B.D.E.S. Hall from 1-5 p.m. For information and Tickets, please call (707) 746-5526

ANOTHER SPECIAL EVENT

The Solano County Arts Council has invited us to present a display of costumes and sets at their Gallery located on the 2nd Floor in the Solano Mall (next to JC Penny) from April 22nd to May 15th. Please come to the Grand Opening on Tuesday, April 22nd at 7:00 p.m.

PRESIDENT'S GREETING

It has been an eventful year for our group. The 33rd Season began with a very successful Toast to the Arts event in July, our 6th Annual, under the direction of Dyanne Vojvoda and Dan Clark. Then, in August, we experienced the theft of nearly every tool we had accumulated over the past 33 years down to our hammers, nails, and screws. Our community responded with generous gifts for the tool fund and an important donation from EXOON so that we were able to produce and open our Fall Show, "Jake's Women" on time.

In February, BOTTG was awarded a special ARTY Award by the Solano Arts Council for 33 years of continuous service to the community.

Then, we were all saddened by the passing of Adam LaZarre and then, Norm Gonzalez, Jr., both of whom had cared for and participated in the development of our theatre company. Adam's wife, Jett, has asked that any donations be made to the American Heart Association, and BOTTG has chosen to donate a portion of the proceeds from our April 27th show to the trust fund set up at Continental Pacific Bank for Norm and Carol's children, Amelia and Martin.

As we prepared for our opening of THE FANTASTICKS, we lost our lead actress, but were fortunate that Marissa DeClercq was available to step into a role that she enjoys.

In spite of our hardships and losses, we look forward to our 34th Season as we seek new members, volunteers, and continued community support. However, BOTTG continues to be financially strapped. If you are interested in making a donation in terms of money or time, being on our mailing list, becoming a volunteer or member, receiving our monthly newsletter, or getting on our audition list, please find the SIGN UP SHEET in the lobby, or talk to one of our members! I wish you all the best! And, now, please enjoy our show, "THE FANTASTICKS."

Rick Ernst

The Fantasticks

Theater to open, and tradition returns

By Catherine D. Jacobson
Staff writer

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's spring musical is a tradition.

The group has been operating its dinner theater for more than 30 years—longer than any other in Northern California—and features a play in the fall and a musical in the spring.

This year's musical production is "The Fantasticks," a romantic comedy in which two fathers conspire to see their children married.

The theater group had its challenges, however, in getting the production ready for opening night Friday, April 11, at B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia.



DOUG HAM/DAI Photo

Designer Doug Ham works on the set for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Fantasticks." The spring musical opens Friday, April 11, at B.D.E.S. Hall in Benicia. Performances continue every weekend through May 17.

After rehearsals had begun, the show's female lead got a call to join the cast of "Beach Blanket Babylon" in San Francisco and accepted the opportunity.

Marissa DeClercq of Concord stepped into the lead

role and cast members barely missed a beat, says Andrew Pettit of Walnut Creek, who plays "the wall" between the two lovers.

"I think people will love the show," says Pettit, "because the emotions involved are amazing."

The small cast held extra rehearsals so DeClercq could get up to speed. It helped that she had been in a previous production of "The Fantasticks," says King, and that she and

Theater, see page 5.

Theater

From page 1

male lead Nick Dothee went to school together and were good friends.

Director David Roster, who has directed eight previous Benicia Old Town Theatre Group productions including the award-winning "Bleacher Bums," is taking the helm again for "The Fantasticks."

"Everything he has done is interesting and innovative," says King.

"The Fantasticks" lends itself to originality and set designer Doug Ham has made the stage appear as if it is a pier on the Benicia waterfront, with pilings and decking. It is built out from the stage, projecting into the seating area.

"The show is intimate and I want to bring it out into the audience," says Ham, who has been designing sets for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group for more than 15 years.

He never tires of the job because each production has its own unique characteristics. Ham says it is a challenge to work on a small stage like B.D.E.S. Hall, but adds that he has built so many sets he knows the stage area almost to the inch. Ham has also designed sets for very small to large venues.

"The Fantasticks" is playing through Saturday, May 17.

A portion of the proceeds from a special matinee performance Sunday, April 27, will be dedicated to the family of Norman V. Gonsalves Jr., who died Feb. 17. The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will also make a separate donation to the Martin and Amelia Gonsalves Trust Fund.

Gonsalves was active in the theater group, serving as its president in 1975.

"Norm was a member of our group and one of the most popular people in town," says King. The cast of "The Fantasticks"



DAVID ROSTER/DAI Photo

Cast members of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "The Fantasticks" are (clockwise, from left) Nick Dothee, Andrew Pettit, Richard Howarter, John Blytt, Doug Brown and Marie Gainer, who has been replaced by Marissa DeClercq (not pictured).

It's fantastic!

What: "The Fantasticks"
Who: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Where: B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia
When: April 11-May 17
Telephone: 746-1269

features Richard Howarter and Marissa DeClercq of Concord; Steve Waranietz of Vallejo; Nick Dothee and Susanne Bagnio of Martinez; Doug Brown of Alamo; John Blytt of Pleasant Hill; and Andrew Pettit of Walnut Creek.

Opening night includes a

post-production champagne gala, says King. Tickets are \$17 and will include champagne, hors d'oeuvres, and the opportunity to meet the cast. Doors for all Friday night performances will open at 7 p.m., with curtain at 8 p.m.

Doors for all Saturday night dinner theater shows open at 6:30 p.m., followed by an 8 p.m. curtain. Tickets are \$25.

Sunday matinees will begin at 4 p.m. April 20, April 27 and May 4. Tickets are \$12. Call 746-1269 for reservations or 746-4876 for group reservations.



COURTESY PHOTO

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group members perform "The Fantasticks" through May 17.

A PHENOMENON — Times have changed radically since Ben Jones and Harvey Schmidt's phenomenally successful "The Fantasticks" opened in 1960. In addition to such timeless songs as "Try to Remember" and "Soon It's Gonna Rain," its offbeat humor and elusive magic, the musical now projects a touching, youthful innocence that would seem to be lost and gone forever.

Under David Roster's practiced direction, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production at the B.D.E.S. Hall on West J Street gets off to an exuberant opening that leads into the story of the teen-age lovers who learn that they must "die a little" before they grow up.

Perfectly cast in the leading roles of Luisa and Matt are Marissa DeClercq and Nick Dothee. High school students with appealing voices, they give polished performances that reflect their experience and training.

Matt and Luisa's busybody plotting fathers (Steve Waranietz and Doug Brown) think the kids are an ideal match, but they pretend to disapprove. All too soon, however, the fathers, both acid gardeners, realize that "if you plant a radish, you get a radish" but it's almost impossible to predict what your children will do.

El Gallo (drawn with a wonderfully gossamer touch by agile Richard Howarter) serves as the *deus ex machina*, who wields a magic wand and has a lot of common sense. Adding to the fantasy are the quivering Old Actor (John Blytt) and the irrepressible Mortimer Gussone Baguio, who pop out of a trunk and put on a show.

Traditionally, the all-important garden wall divides the families. In Roster's production the *Mate*, usually portrayed by a woman as an ethereal sprite, serves as the wall. Andrew Pettit handles the role with mischievous élan, but the original interpretation is more effective.

The recorded music — featuring the skills of Kristy Jubano, Joe Barnett, Derek Jones, Barbara Tuff and Ken Bergmann — works very well in the company's makeshift theater. Doug Ham's effective set and Dyanne Vajda and Shaun Carroll's imaginative costumes add to the fun.

THE ARTYS



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

P.O. Box 602
Benicia, CA 94510
(707) 746-1269

"Quality Theatre Since 1964"

'ARTY' AWARDS

1997 Matthew Davis John Blytt David Roster	Lead Actor Supporting Actor Director	Comedy Comedy Comedy	Bullshot Bullshot Bullshot	Crummond Crummond Crummond
1996 Richard Howarter BOTTG	Supporting Actor Continuing Excellence Award	Musical	Little Shop of Horrors	
1995 Joe Gulstino P.J. Bayliss Ted Curry Rumors	Supporting Actor Supporting Actress Director Outstanding Comedy	Comedy Comedy Comedy Comedy	Rumors Rumors Rumors Rumors	
1994 David Roster Bleacher Bums Audrey Kinnaman Kate O'Neill	Director Outstanding Comedy Costume Design Supporting Actress	Comedy Comedy Musical Musical	Bleacher Bums Annie Annie	
1993 Lia Jett Adam Lazarre	Lead Actress Director	Comedy Musical	Passion of Dracula A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum	
Audrey Kinnaman	Costume Design	Musical		



Bums' on Roster of Arty winners



The cast of Benicia's production of "Bleacher Bums" were honored with the Arty award for best comedy of 1994 in Solano County.



David Roster was honored as best director for his work on "Bleacher Bums."

last appearance in Benicia was in "Ah Wilderness."

The actress, who has studied professionally, won for her supporting role in "Annie." O'Neill played Miss Hannigan, the drunken manager of the orphanage where Annie is confined at the beginning of the show. "It is one of those parts I wanted to play in my lifetime," O'Neill said. "She's so rich

and comedy is my forte."

This was also the first Arty given to Kinnaman, who designed the costumes for "Annie," and who previously supplied the wardrobe for BOTTG productions of "Into the Woods" and "A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum."

During the awards ceremony, held Saturday in Fairfield, one of Benicia's rising stars gave a performance. Stephanie Barnum, who played the title role in "Annie," performed the song "Maybe" from the show.

The 8-year-old was also nominated for an award, as were 16 other actors and producers on the two Benicia shows.

This year's spring production by the BOTTG will be "A Chorus Line," which opens April 7.



Susanne Bagnio of Martinez and Steve Waranietz of Vallejo are featured in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Bullshot Drummond," which opens Oct. 17 at the BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia.

'Bullshot Drummond' Opens BOTTG's Season

The opening fall production of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's 34th season is **Bullshot Drummond**, a hysterical farce in the British tradition written by Ron House, Diz White, Alan Sherman, John Neville-Andrews and Derek Cunningham.

The show had a lengthy run in San Francisco with the original cast several years ago. The Benicia production is being directed by ARTY award winner David Roster and is being designed by ARTY winner Doug Ham.

Bullshot Drummond is a parody of low-budget 1930s detective movies that typify British heroism. Teutonic vil-

lain Otto von Brunno (Steve Waranietz of Vallejo) and his evil mistress, Leneya (Susanne Bagnio of Martinez) crash their plane in the English countryside and kidnap Professor Fenton (John Blytt of Pleasant Hill) who has discovered a formula for making synthetic diamonds.

Bullshot Drummond (Matthew Davis of West Pittsburg) is called to the rescue. Otto paralyzes Crummond with a Swedish ray and rams a stick of dynamite in Crummond's mouth which will explode when the next person enters the room. Rosemary (Michelle Krapp of Concord) enters, but a static of static electricity in her fur

wrap averts the detonation. They pursue in a hair-raising car chase, but plunge over a cliff. They sneak into the dungeons where the professor is being tortured, but Crummond hopelessly loses the ensuing saber duel. Unperturbed, Crummond finally triumphs by shooting the rest of the cast.

A champagne opening night gala will be Oct. 17 at 8 p.m., with shows scheduled for Fridays, dinner shows Saturdays and three Sunday matinees at 4 o'clock. Performances continue through Nov. 22. For ticket information phone (707) 746-1262.



The ARTY Award Winning
Benicia Old Town
Theatre Group
proudly presents
Our Fall, 1997
production

Now in our 34th Season!

BULLSHOT CRUMMOND



by Ron House, Diz White
John Neville-Andrews, Alan Shearman
and Derek Cunningham;

based on an idea by
Ron House and Diz White

Directed by:
DAVID ROSTER

Technical Direction
Set & Lighting Design
DOUG HAM

This production is made possible by the generous donations of:

EXXON COMPANY USA, Benicia	Willard & Val Daniels
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Program: Rick Ernst and Donna Welch
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Reservations & Tickets: Pat Wyatt
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Videotaping: Ed Thomas

ARTS & ENTERTAIN

'Bullshot' offers sidesplitting fun

Excellent cast provides non-stop humor in Benicia theater production

By Nanci Bauer

DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Benicia Old Town Theatre Group begins its 54th season opening with a snarling production of "Bullshot Crummond."

A hysterical farce based on the low budget British detective films of the 1930s, "Bullshot Crummond" instantly invokes sidesplitting laughter from the first scene. The story begins when two dastardly villains by the names of Lenya and Otto Von Bruno crash in the English countryside, and turn mishap into kidnap when they overtake Professor Fenton, who has discovered a formula for making diamonds.

Professor Fenton's daughter, Rosemary, calls upon the incredibly handsome and dashing hero, Hugh "Bullshot" Crummond, who responds to the lovely daughter's cry for help. Crummond and Rosemary together encounter the villainous Lenya and Von Bruno and between paralyzing light rays, death defying car chases, sword fights and torturous dungeons, the two manage to defeat the bad guys and save Professor Fenton.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has again brought fine theater and fine dining to local theater patrons. Performing in the oldest dinner theatre in Northern California, the group has put together an uproariously funny production, unmatched in parody by any other production in Solano County so far this year.

The five actors in "Bullshot Crummond" all gave outstanding over-the-top performances. Matthew Davis, in the role of Crummond, is amazingly good, with a laudable British accent and an uncanny ability to play



The cast of Benicia's "Bullshot Crummond" is hilarious.

slapstick humor with unflinching reserve.

Suzanne Bagnio, who plays the evil Lenya, is outrageously good. Last seen in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Fantasticks," her current performance is filled with saucy costumes and dialect, and her sense of timing in delivering snappy one-liners is perfect.

Accolades also go out to

Michelle Krapp as Rosemary, Steve Waranietz as Von Bruno and Scalcio, as well as the amazing John Blytt, who appeared as several supporting characters in this performance.

"Bullshot's" director, David

Roster, has obviously chosen the ultimate cast for this production. The play is filled with non-stop humor and the characters are well developed.

The set design by Doug Ham

REVIEW 'Bullshot Crummond'

THROUGH NOV. 22
B.D.E.S. HALL,
WEST J STREET, BENICIA
\$12-\$25
746-1269

is simple and interchangeable. With a basic black backdrop, the stage is variably changed from English tea room to torture chamber with a few well placed props and some large stage additions, such as a window or precipitous cliff.

Costumes were created by Dalene Waranietz, LaVerne Waranietz and Dyanne Vojvoda. The costuming was kept in theme with the parody of 1930s detective films, where the bad guys usually wore black and the good guys wore white. Following this predication, the costumes were humorously designed, with virginal lace dresses for Rosemary, sleek black dresses and wigs for Lenya, and a most well-endowed athletic get-up for Crummond.

Overall, "Bullshot Crummond" is a delightfully funny and entertaining performance. This production is definitely worth seeing, and is worth the drive to Benicia.

Performances are as follows: cocktail shows on Fridays, Oct. 24 & 31 and Nov. 7, 14, & 21 at 8 p.m.; dinner shows on Saturdays, Oct. 25 and Nov. 1, 8, 15, & 22 at 8 p.m.; and Sunday matinees on Oct. 26, Nov. 2, 9, & 16 at 2 p.m. at the B.D.E.S. Hall on West J Street in downtown Benicia. Ticket prices are \$12 for matinee and cocktail shows, and \$25 for dinner shows. For more information or reservations, call 746-1269.

Nanci Bauer is a local theater correspondent.

PRODUCTION VOLUNTEERS

Auditions: Rick Ernst, Amy Klapprott, Martin Leon, Dalene Waranietz
Bartenders: (Chair: Noalie Shotwell) Irene "Bergie" Bergamini, Mike Cooper, Mike Downing, Corey Farley, Judy Foster, Bob Harris, Amy Klapprott, Dennis Maheffey, Barbara McFadden, Kathy McFadden, Bernie & Julie Rose, and Diane Snowden
Cashiers: (Chair: Noalie Shotwell) Corey Farley, Kay Hlavka, Amy Klapprott, Vicki Maffei, Betty Murphy, Judy Riedinger, Noalie Shotwell, Pat Wall, and Dalene Waranietz
Costumes: Margie Bryce, Shaun Carol, Amy Klapprott, Lynda Klapprott, Judy Newell, Dyanne Vojvoda, and Dalene Waranietz
Front Desk & Hall Set-up: Cyndi & Guy Clouse, Kay Hlavka, Janice Hoss, Phyllis Malicki, Janice & Lucky Sells, Belinda Smith, Dyanne Vojvoda, Dalene Waranietz, and Donna Welch
Gift Shop: (Chair: Noalie Shotwell) Lillian Downing, Donna Welch, Bill & Linda Barron, Betty Murphy, Judy Foster, and Lillian Thomas
Host & Hostesses: (Chair: Shannon Marr) Chris Barnuin, Joe & Becky Barnett, Linda & Bill Barron, Bob Berman, Diane Brockman, Theresa Brookshier, Pat Conery Jane Carl, Kathy & John DeClercq, Sharon Fanta, Kathy Fink, Judy Foster, Sharon Fry, Joe Guardino, Patty Gavin, Christy Gardner & George Bond, Judy Goode, Merry Gregg, Nancy Guevera, Tracy Hartwell, Renee Hickenbotham, Kristine & Curt Hoffman, Janice & Bill Hoss, Judy Hough, Reese Johansen, Gwen Jordan, Michelle & Paul Kelly, Nan Landis, Kit Lee, Barbara Lincoln, Jill Long, Shirley Lofgren, Monica Loveless, Laurel Mudal, Vicki Maffei, Jay Magit, Chandra Mann, Dave Marks, Shannon Marr, Pat & Mike Mathews, Peggy Mosby, Kathleen O'Daniels, Darlene Olson, Julie Parson, Ann Petty, Judy & Jerry Potter, Sue Powderly, Judy Reavis, Kay & Bill Reid, Judy Riedinger, Jana Robinson, Richard Rundquist, Donna Sanderson, Sandy Schiff, Elaine Seput, Diane Shaver, Irv Siegel, Diane Snowden, Laz Stallings, Chris & Rick Stouffer, Dottie Sundorf, Lee Syracuse, Melinda Tatro, Janice Thacker, Lillian Thomas, Kate Tracy, Lillette & Chuck Tyler, Terry Walsh, Dalene Waranietz, Donna Welch, and Gina Zito
House Managers: (Chair: Dave Marks) Mike Downing, Kay Hlavka, Amy Klapprott, David Marks, Shannon Marr, Wally McCartney, and Ed Thomas
Jr. Host & Hostesses: (Chair: Martin Leon) Stuart Atkins, Stephanie Barum, Anne Casebolt, Adlie Dixon, Amber Dudd, Sabrina Escobosa, Emily & Sara Flores, Laura Freese, Tracy Fry, Lauren Gavin, Liz Goebel, Harriett Greenwood, Meggie Grijalva, Katie Gully, Jason Harlander, JD Heckaman, William Hoss, Tim Leon, Peter Mallo, Nick Montemson, Peter Ortiz, Julie Pier, Becky Potter, Emily Reid, Miranda Russo, Heather Sanderson, Jessica Seput, Jesse Smith, Kali Stanger, Briana Whitford, and Leshe Williams
Publicity, Reviewers, Posters: Shirley King, Barbara Fugate, and Martin Leon
Set Construction & Painting Crew: Logan Bryce, Dan Clark, Larry Clark, Rick Ernst, Amy Klapprott, Martin Leon, Vicki Maffei, Dave Marks, Wally McCartney, Dave Marks, Ed Thomas, Rob Wood, Steve Waranietz, Donna Welch, and Rob Wood
Videotaping: Ed Thomas

MARK TWAIN

FEBRUARY, 1998

BOTTG brings Twain to town

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nearly 100 years after famed author and lecturer Mark Twain's demise, he is planning a substantial comeback with a traveling one-man show, scheduled to stop over at the BDES Hall in a few weeks.

The show is titled "The Report of My Death," and Twain—well, make that Chris LeGate, a Grass Valley resident known around the Gold Country for his impeccable impersonation of Twain—is expected to talk about his boyhood days in Hannibal, his experiences on the Mississippi River and his adventures out west.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is sponsoring this two-night, one-matinee Mark Twain extravaganza on Feb. 6 and 7, to kick off of its 1998 theater season.

It is LeGate's first foray into the Bay Area, having performed mostly in Twain's old haunts, Nevada City, Grass Valley, and Marysville where all gold rush towns where Twain strode the footlights with his quirky brand of Missouri humor, so did LeGate.

In at least two of those Sierra foothill towns, residents know LeGate more as Twain than himself. He performs each weekend at the Holbrooke Hotel in Grass Valley, where Twain often stopped over when he visited that hilly mining town.

A veteran actor and the owner of Safewater Productions, LeGate began his career as Twain on a whim, to fill in as a notable character at a local "Living History Day."

"I thought it'd be a temporary deal," LeGate said. "But here was an opportunity to really look into somebody's life. Now it's a life-



Chris LeGate as Mark Twain long commitment."

LeGate has also been a familiar figure as Twain during summer walking tours in Grass Valley, a popular tourist mecca. His white coat and trousers, large mustache

and long white hair has turned heads all across Nevada City. His regular appearances at local community events and fairs have enhanced his Twain persona.

"I always try to suspend people's belief," LeGate said. "I'm usually pretty reserved, but I find Twain saying things that Chris LeGate wouldn't."

Benicia historians have often wondered if the real Twain ever explored First Street.

He once wrote an account of a steamship wreck near Rio Vista while working as a reporter for the Sacramento Union.

To reach the gold country by water, Twain must certainly have known about Benicia on his trek north, but no solid evidence of Benicia stopover has emerged so far.

That will all change in February.

LeGate's BDES performance will include a Twain question-and-answer session following his performance, when the audience may ask any Twain-related question. Even better, they will hear an answer as Twain would have stated it, with all the humor and d wit of the author of "Huckleberry Finn."

This aspect of his characterization has taken LeGate years research on Twain's life to perfect.

"Up here (in Nevada City) we have our share of mystical stuff but I don't make any claims to be in touch with Twain," LeGate said. "I just hope that wherever he is, he's smiling down over me and what I'm doing."

Reserved tickets are \$12 and are now available by calling 746-1269.

Tickets will also be available at the door. Showtimes are at 8 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 6, and Saturday, Feb. 7, with a matinee scheduled on Saturday at 2 p.m.

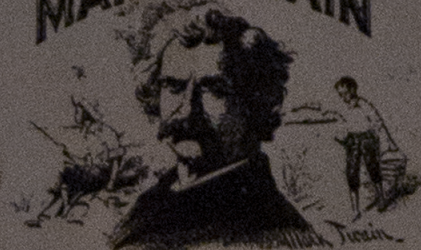
The show is family friendly.

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

PROUDLY PRESENTS

CHRIS LEGATE
AS

MARK TWAIN



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6: 8 P.M.
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7: 2 P.M., 8 P.M.
\$12.

A FAMILY SHOW

Reservations: (707) 746-1269
BDES HALL 140 WEST J STREET
BENICIA

MARK TWAIN IN BENICIA

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6 & 7

DOORS OPEN AT SEVEN. TROUBLE BEGINS AT EIGHT.

A DAZZLING FIREWORKS DISPLAY is not expected to be anywhere near the theater. A 101-PIECE MARCHING BAND will be performing somewhere in the next county. THE WONDERFUL COW WITH SIX LEGS is not attached with our company. THE CROWD CAN EXPECT A TORCH LIGHT PROCESSION, in fact the crowd can expect just about anything it pleases but we can only guarantee a provocative and satisfying evening.

It should be brought to the public's attention that at any time Mr. Twain may leave town without paying his hotel bill. He has performed this trick on a number of occasions and can be expected to repeat it at any time. After his lecture at the Benicia Old Town Theatre, he will leave the building and enter a vacant house for the purpose of inventorying its contents. It is unlikely that he will miss a thing, not as many things as the owner of the house will be missing in the morning.

THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE IS LOCATED AT 140 W. "J" ST., BENICIA
FOR RESERVATIONS TELEPHONE (707) 746-1269

BULLSHOT CRUMMOND

Fall, 1997

One night only

BOTTG revives an old idea — its talent show

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

After a lapse of nearly four years, the BOTTG Talent Show is reviving its semi-annual, popular, talent show for a one-night-only performance on Saturday, March 14.

The talent show is a fundraiser for BOTTG's coming season. During last Sunday's preliminary rounds, some 21 hopefuls showed up to vie for a shot at fame and fortune on the next show next week.

"It's been really popular in the past," said BOTTG member Shirley King. "People kept calling and asking us when we were going to have it again."

Traditionally, talent shows have been a venue for young, aspiring performers, and BOTTG's talent show is no different.

While a student, a cute little red-haired boy came in and played the violin, and a teenage girl played piano and sang," King said.

Children started by show biz, like St. Dominic's School fourth-grader Stephanie Barakat, remembers that it was the BOTTG talent show that year she and her cousin produced "Annie," that prompted her to discuss with singing lessons.

"I sang 'Sing, Sing the Songs of My Heart,'" said Stephanie, who has since performed with a dozen production companies from the Douglas Light Opera Company to the Solano College Theatre. She has earned a WILLIE nomination for best featured actress for her performance in "Annie Warbucks" and a BARTY nomination for Best Actress for "Annie."

After the talent show, four years ago, Stephanie began to compete in the California State Talent Competitions, and has captured "Grand Champion Vocalist" since 1991. So, one could say that the BOTTG talent show was Stephanie's first "break." Then again, it could have been when her mother decided to let her take singing lessons two years prior to that.

"I was taking singing lessons," said Stephanie's mother, Chris. "The idea for her to do talent shows came to me when she was in eighth grade."

This year was a hard down-memory lane for Stephanie, as she brought in a record number of entries for this year's talent show and later got called back. She says she also wants to try out for BOTTG's coming production of "Annie Warbucks."

"There are three different talent show categories pertaining to age," King said. "The show is being organized by a committee composed of Pat Wyatt, Susan Kelly, Janice Hall and Judy Foster."

Prizes for the three winners, donated by Day View Bank for each group are: a \$100, \$75 and \$50 Savings Bond.

The talented Lee Syracuse has agreed to act as emcee. The show will be judged by BOTTG Advisory Board members: Blanche, Patti, Eason, Stephanie, Christensen, Steve Ridge, John Hall, Terry May, Fred Newhouse and Melissa Nye.

The stage is at the BOTTG Hall at 140 West 1 Street at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$5, available from BOTTG's Chamber of Commerce or at the show. Children age 6 or younger are admitted free.



Stephanie Barakat won the last talent competition.
140 West 1 Street at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$5, available from BOTTG's Chamber of Commerce or at the show. Children age 6 or younger are admitted free.

TALENT SHOW March, 1998



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group Talent Show boffo at BDES Hall

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's March 14 Talent Show drew a capacity crowd for 27 kids radiating enough energy and star power to light up the entire BDES Hall.

Master of Ceremonies Lee Syracuse moved the program along while judges Jim Bianchi, Stephanie Christiansen, Barbara Fugate, John Hall, Terry Hay, Janice Hoss, Dave Marks, Shannon Mori and Melissa Noble had the daunting task of selecting the winners.

Judging criteria included Presentation, Level of Difficulty and Talent. Bonus points were allowed for stage presence.

First prize in the 10 and Under Category (10 and under) went to Ashley Lecair who sang "Everything's Coming Up Roses." Elizabeth Markus's comic skit "My Name is Joe" brought in second prize, while Karyn DeSouza won third singing "Colors of the Wind."

With her performance of "Don't Ram on My Parade," Stephanie Barnum took first prize in the age 11 -- 12 category. In second place was Michelle Lansbarkis with a cello solo. "Sonata in C Major." Amanda Gamblin walked off with third prize, singing "Broadway Babies."

In the Teen Group, Becky Potter received a first prize with her rendition of "Nothing" from "A Chorus Line." Katie Jo Dolan took second prize by singing "Hero" to her own piano accompaniment. Third place was a flat-out tie between Alex Harlander's piano solo, "Phantom of the Opera," and Eugene Piernas singing



1998 BOTTG Talent Show Winners, back row, left to right: Amanda Gamblin, Michelle Lansbarkis, Eugene Piernas, Becky Potter, Katie Jo Dolan, Stephanie Barnum. Middle row: Elizabeth Markus, Karyn DeSouza, Ashley Lecair. Front: Alex Harlander.

Winners for Age 10 and Under. Left to right: Elizabeth Markus, Karyn DeSouza, Ashley Lecair.



Bay View Federal Bank's Donna Welch bestows awards on Third Place tie winners Alex Harlander and Eugene Piernas in the Teen Category.

"I Believe I Could Fly."

Prizes donated by Bay View Federal Bank and awarded by banker Donna Welch for each group were: First, \$100 Savings Bond; Second, \$75 Bond and Third, \$50 Bond.

All entrants took the stage for the grand finale and to receive their Participation Certificates and ribbons and a standing ovation from the crowd.

BOTTG President Doug Ham praised talent show committee members Pat Wyatt, Susan Kelly, Janice Hoss and Judy Potter for

their dedication and hard work "as well as all those other theatre group members who helped plan and present this outstanding event."





Benicia Old Town Theatre
proudly presents

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Toast to the Arts

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A showcase of fine wines from Northern California & featuring contemporary artwork presented by Arts Benicia

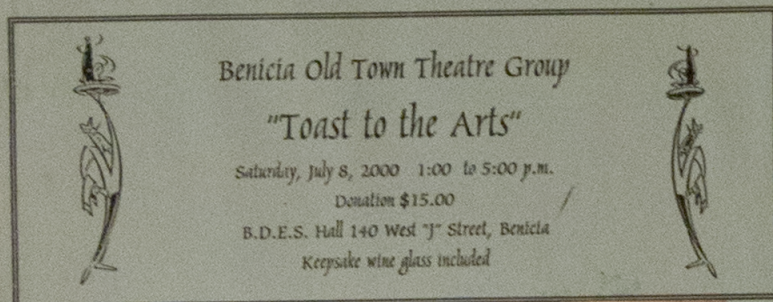
Donation \$15.00 - includes keepsake glass

Location - Historic B.D.E.S. Hall
140 West J Street
Benicia, CA.

Information: (707) 746-5526



TOAST TO THE ARTS



NO 366





April, 1998

BOTTG opens 'Love Letters' April 17

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and Winters Community Theater have joined forces to bring A. R. Gurney's award-winning "Love Letters" to Benicia's BDES Hall for a three-weekend run beginning April 17.

The unique partnership between the two community theater troupes involves the rotation of actors within the same production, thanks to a loan of actors from the WCT. Each weekend performance of "Love Letters" — which features only two actors, a man and a woman — will have different couples: some from Benicia, some

from Winters. Shannon Marr, past president of BOTTG, was instrumental in setting up the unusual alliance. The Winters group had already been performing their own version of "Love Letters" when Marr came to the show one night.

"Shannon came up to see the play," said WCT past president Howard Hupé. "She approached me about doing 'Love Letters' in Benicia, and our board agreed."

"Love Letters" centers around a 45-year correspondence between the two characters, from the time they were children, somewhere in middle age. The letters reveal



Linda Barron and Dan Clark of 'Love Letters'

See Stories, page A4

and "The Phantom of the Opera Melodrama."

Off-Sebastian has acted in more than 50 productions with 19 different theater groups. He directed "Old Couple" and "Die Fleckenstein," both nominated for the Eleanor McClatchy Award for Theatrical Excellence. His wife Lenore performs with the Sacramento Light Opera, Music Circus and many other community theater groups.

Daniel W. Stauson and Maria Ryken acted together recently in the Woodland Open House production of "Sisters Remembered." They were recipients of the Open House "Chefs" Award for Best Actor and Actress in 1997.

The schedule for "Love Letters" has Gil and Lenore Sebastian on the opening night and second show of April 17 and 19. Howard and Germaine Hupé will appear on April 18 and 20.

Daniel W. Stauson and Maria Ryken are slated for April 24 and 25. Benicia's Dan Clark and Linda Barron on May 1. Linda and Bill Barron will take the stage on May 2 and 3.

Friday and Saturday night cocktail shows are \$12, contain a 6 p.m. The April 26 matinee is \$12 with a 4 p.m. curtain.

BOTTG offers a Sunday May 3 noon brunch at \$25 with catering by Antonette's Cuisine and a 1 p.m. curtain.

All shows at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street in Benicia. Call

relationship through the

The play is something of an oddity in that past productions have often featured couples who are married in real life. This tradition holds true for Benicia's production.

Appearing in "Love Letters" for the first and second weekends are Gil and Lenore Sebastian and Howard and Germaine Hupé from WCT, followed by closing performances by Benicia's Linda and Bill Barron.

Other, non-related actors appear featured in some of the performances. Daniel W. Stauson and Maria Ryken will appear in "Love Letters" on April 24 and 25.

"It's a kind of an unusual play in that you actually read the lines," Hupé said. "There's no real movement, but you have to involve the audience, and keep them interested. We do it with facial expressions for one; it's tricky, frankly. It doesn't hurt to have good writing, and Gurney is a fine writer."

It isn't the first time the Hupés have appeared on stage together. The same holds true for the Barrons. This real-life connection brings an added dimension to "Love Letters."

"While the couple is not married, certainly there's a long history of knowing each other," said Bill Barron, a psychology professor at JPS University. "That we bring to the part, I recall that once the couple was played by Jayne Meadows and Steve Allen."

The Barrons have performed in a number of BOTTG productions beginning in the 1970s. Linda's first show was BOTTG's "See How They Run."

"Love Letters" is about the fifth that we've done together," Linda said.

Linda, who has held major roles in over 40 Bay Area productions, will also star alongside Benicia's Dan Clark, who will take over Bill's role for one performance.

"Danny and I have appeared in several shows together," Linda said. "We appeared together in the first show I ever did in Benicia — Ten Nights in a Barroom. We've been married 34 years."

The WCT "Love Letters" tag team will come to town with a heavy-hitting theater background. Howard and Germaine founded the WCT with Howard directing many of their productions. Germaine is an actress and playwright who has written "The Other Wife."

Nothing Barron about couple's acting ability

'Love Letters' an affair of the heart

By RICHARD FREEDMAN
Times-Herald community editor



LINDA AND Bill Barron have a rip on their roles in "Love Letters" Saturday and Sunday in Benicia. Dan Clark plays the male lead opposite Linda Barron tonight.

Bill Barron really didn't have the acting bug when he started in community theater. Call it a tick. He was ticked off that his wife, Linda, was away acting so much.

"I did my first show as a retaliatory measure," said Barron. "I wanted to show her what it's like to be left all alone in the evening."

Not only does the Benicia couple get to act in "Love Letters," a cooperative venture by the Benicia Old Town Theater and the Winters Community Theater, they're the only performers featured during Saturday and Sunday final presentation at the BDES Hall. Tonight, Linda Barron is opposite veteran BOTTG actor Dan Clark. The production has also featured three pairs from Winters, including two married couples.

"It's been very nice," said Bill Barron of the teaming with his wife. "By Saturday night, we will have read through the show a dozen, maybe 20 times."

When you live with your co-actor, it does make a difference, the Barrons agreed.

"We've been married 31 years," said Bill, oddly enough, a real-life marriage counselor. "You can't live with someone that long and not know them so well. You get to know the person's timing."

The award-winning A.R. Gurney play focuses on Melissa Gardner and Andrew Ladd, whose abiding love for each other resonates in their correspondence that lasts from the time they are 7 until into their 50s.

"With Dan, I have to make special arrangements to work," said Linda Barron. "With Bill, we can rehearse at home. It's fun. We don't get to do that very often. It's really easy to act against each other because we know each other so well. I can feel his nuances."

Seldom, she said, does she get to act alongside her husband.

"That was the big appeal," she said. Though Linda's frequently checking out audition notices, Bill can only sneak in a role once in a while.

"I work in the evenings as a therapist, so I don't have a chance to do a lot of theater," he said. "Every once in a while, I get the bug. There's not a lot of rehearsal time for this kind of show, which is perfect for me. Linda and I can grab an hour together to do it. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to do theater."

It's the fifth time the couple have been in the same production going back 10 years to "Light Up the Sky."

Bill Barron's training, he said,

was a summer theater class at the University of Texas. Clark, meanwhile, has done dozens of shows for BOTTG.

"Dan and I have been friends for years," said Barron. "There's no competitive component here in any respect. The audiences that see Linda and Dan and the audiences that see Linda and I will be totally different."

"Love Letters" has been performed by many famous couples, including Michael Tucker and Jill Eikenberry and Jayne Meadows and Steve Allen.

"It's the kind of show where the personality of the individual comes through," Bill Barron said.

"There are all sorts of different takes you can do on the presentation of this. The script itself is powerful."

After "Love Letters" is over, it could be some time before the Barrons unite on stage again.

"She's always looking for something to do," Bill said. "That's why we've been married so long. We don't spend a lot of time together."

"Love Letters" with Linda Barron and Dan Clark plays tonight at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 8 p.m. with Barron and Bill Barron, who finish the production Sunday at 4 p.m. at BDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia. For tickets, info@bottg.com, call 766-1200.



Linda and Bill Barron take to the stage in "Love Letters," a story of friends who have been corresponding since childhood.

Team effort produces touching play

By Daniel Bauer

THEATRE GROUP

BENICIA—Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's spring production of "Love Letters" premiered this past weekend in an unusual theatrical joint venture with Winters Community Theatre.

Bringing together the original Winters "Love Letters" cast from their production in November 1997, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group joined forces in creating a stunning show.

"Love Letters," written by A.R. Gurney, is a touching play about two well-to-do characters, Melissa Gardner and Andrew Luck. Their relationship with each other is developed through their correspondence to one another, starting from their childhood in the second grade up to their late middle ages.

Beginning with schoolyard crushes and adolescent passion, Melissa and Andrew

Review Love Letters

8 P.M. FRIDAY AND SATURDAY
4 P.M. SUNDAY
BDES HALL
140 WEST J STREET, BENICIA
746-3325

grow into two very different people who maintain their unique bond and closeness well into adulthood. From alcoholism to custody battles with an ex-spouse, Melissa and Andrew go through it all, leaning on each other spiritually and emotionally. By story's end, their relationship is fully realized and a touch surprising.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and Winters Community Theatre did an outstanding job in uniting forces and presenting a touching production. From the elabo-

rate backdrop to the actors' subtle but discerning gestures, this performance was near perfect in execution and very moving.

Husband-and-wife team Leanne and Gil Sebastian played the respective roles of Melissa and Andrew on opening night and each gave a wonderful performance. While the roles are shared and performers rotated among other acting couples in both groups, the simplicity of this play and the well-developed dialogue provide for a wide variety of acting interpretations and experiences.

"Love Letters" is a remarkable play that is worth seeing more than once. BOTTG and WCT's joint production is performing at the BDES Hall at 140 West J Street in Benicia on Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 4 p.m., with final performances on May 1-3. For more information, call 746-3325.

Daniel Bauer is a local theater correspondent.

'Letters' is something to write home about

By MARILYN MCLEHANEY
Times Herald Correspondent

"Love Letters" is a popular and timely play. Its recent three-week run at Solano College Theatre was quite successful, and now it is being presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. When BOTTG's past president Shannon Marr saw it performed at the Winters Community Theatre, she knew she wanted to bring it to Benicia. The result is a successful collaboration between BOTTG and Winters Community Theatre, using actors from both groups.

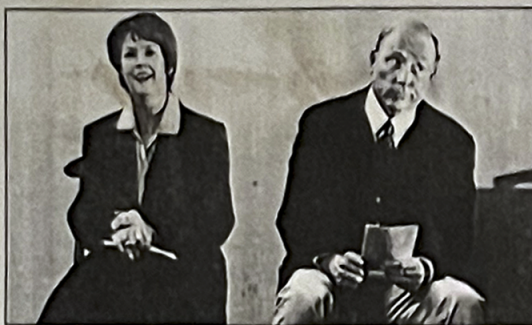
"Love Letters" is a compelling and imaginative play, presented in readers' theatre style.

Chronicling the relationship between two lifelong friends, Melissa and Andrew, the play unfolds through the letters these characters exchange over nearly 50 years.

As 7-year-olds writing curt, one-line notes, or 47-year-olds embroiled in midlife crises, Melissa and Andy produce a correspondence that is honest, direct and speaks to the heart.

Playwright A. R. Gurney stipulates that the cast only has two rehearsals, resulting in a spontaneous performance. He describes "Love Letters" as "a play, or rather a sort of play, which needs no theater, no lengthy rehearsal, no set and no memorization of lines." What it does need is sensitive, gifted actors who "listen eagerly and actively to each other along the way," Gurney said.

Gil and Leanne Sebastian, from



LINDA AND BILL BARRON are two of the rotating members of "Love Letters," a Benicia Old Town Theatre and Winters Community Theatre production.

Winters Community Theatre who performed on opening night, possessed these qualities and brought vibrancy to their characters.

Using different actors each weekend results in different and unique revelations about the two characters and keeps the spontaneity in their performances.

Without benefit of costumes or props, the audience sees the characters develop through their vocal inflections and changes in body language.

"Love Letters" addresses the deep human need for connection, understanding and unconditional acceptance.

Letter-writing is elevated to an art form in this play. Andy and Melissa's letters are heartwarming and cathartic.

you, but you can't interrupt." In another letter he tells her, "Writing is giving a piece of myself to you. Throw me away or read me over and over through the years."

Melissa's character is strong-willed, rebellious and obstinate. A free spirit, she hates constraints and she hates letter-writing.

Trying to explain her way out of an awkward situation when she is caught necking with one of Andy's college friends, she writes, "You can be attracted to someone you hate."

The BOTTG evening performances are cabaret style. Opening night patrons enjoyed no-host wine, appetizers and desserts catered by Antoinette Cucina.

Usually this show is done with no set. However, Doug Ham designed an attractive backdrop with paisley wallpaper, a large picture window and a chandelier, adding a sense of ambience.

"Love Letters" reaches beyond the personal to the universal. Andrew and Melissa are Everyman and Everywoman who are lucky enough to grow up and grow older with a best friend.

"Love Letters" continues April 24 and 25 with no-host cocktail shows at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$12. On April 26 the matinee is at 4 p.m. Additional shows are May 1 and 2 at 8 p.m. and a noon brunch show for \$25 on May 3.

Rotating cast members include Daniel Slomson and Maria Ryken from Winters Community Theatre on April 24 and 25. Founders of the Winters Community Theatre, Howard and Germaine Hape, perform on April 26. Benicia residents Linda Barron and Dan Clark perform on May 1, and Bill Barron joins his wife on stage on May 2 and 3.

For reservations call 746-1340.



The ARTY Award Winning
Benicia Old Town
Theatre Group
proudly presents
Our Spring, 1998
production

Now in our 34th Season!

A.R. Gurney's

LOVE LETTERS

Technical Direction & Set Design
DOUG HAM

Audio Engineer
LARRY CLARK

Stage Manager
MARTIN LEON

Chief Carpenter
WALLY MCCARTNEY

Billboards & Scenic Artist
MIERNIE BUCHANAN, PRISM ILLUSTRATION

This production is made possible by the generous Donations of:

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Love Letters cast: Top row: Daniel W. Slomson, Gil Sebastian, Howard Hape. Bottom row: Marilyn Ryken, Leanne Sebastian, Germaine Hape.

BOTTG WILL OPEN ITS "LOVE LETTERS"

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and Winters Community Theatre join forces to present A.R. Gurney's award-winning two person play, "Love Letters." April 17 through May 3. The leading roles of Melissa Gardner and Andrew Luck, two engaging characters whose striking love resonates in their correspondence, are played April 17 and 18 by Gil and Leanne Sebastian from WCT.

Appearing April 19 and 20 are Howard and Germaine Hape, WCT founders. A third Winters couple, Maria Ryken and Daniel W. Slomson, are on stage May 24 and 25. These of Benicia's best-known and most popular actors will showcase the three-week run of "Love Letters." Dan Clark performs with Linda Barron on May 1. Linda and Bill Barron take the stage on May 2 and 3.

Friday and Saturday night cocktail shows are \$15, starting at 8 p.m. A Sunday, April 26 matinee is \$10, starting at 4 p.m. Special Sunday May 3 brunch is \$25, with catering by Antoinette's Cucina, brunch at 10 a.m., show at 1 p.m. An evening of BDES Hall, 140 West J Street, Benicia. Call 746-1340 for reservations.

Tickets are also on sale at the Benicia Chamber of Commerce.

DAN SCOPAZZI'S OUTER MISSION, MIDDLE CLASS

MAY 8 - 17

OUTER MISSION, OTHER CLASS — NEW BOTTO PRODUCTION

Benicia Old Town
Theatre Group presents
Dan Scopazzi in "Outer
Mission, Middle Class" for
two weekends only, May 8
and 17.

A former stand-up
comedian and actor, a suc-
cessful run of this uncle in
San Francisco, Scopazzi
has worked comedy clubs
with Robin Williams, Jay
Leno and Jerry Seinfeld.

The San Mateo Times
describes his play as
"vibrant, satirical, an
amusing and entertaining
ride."

"Scopazzi's show for
adults alternates between
the absurd, the serious and
the sublime, always early
stated with his later
life as a happy man who
celebrates having good
neighbors and a loving fam-
ily," reports the Workman of
the San Francisco
Chronicle.

This material comes
from the comedian's own
experience as one of five
children of an immigrant
Italian mother and a home-
maker living in San
Francisco's Outer Mission
District.

May 8, 9 and 15 are 8
p.m. Cocktail shows, \$12.
Sunday, May 10 is a
Mother's Day brunch at
noon, show at 1 p.m., \$25,
catering by Antonette's
Cucina. Sunday, May 17 is
a 4 p.m. matinee, \$12.

Please call 746-1269
for information and reserva-
tions. Tickets also will be
sold at the door. All shows
are presented in BDES Hall,
140 West J Street, Benicia.

BOTTG brings a little SF to Benicia

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Former stand-up comic Dan
Scopazzi will probably have a
series of flashbacks when he
arrives in suburban Benicia Friday
night to kick off two weekends of
his one-man show, "Outer Mis-
sion, Middle Class."

The show is the Benicia Old
Town Theatre Group's fourth
offering of the spring season in its
new, busier format. "Outer Mis-
sion, Middle Class" revolves

around Scopazzi's experiences
growing up in the San Francisco
Mission district and his subsequent
jittery sojourn into the depths of a
suburban bedroom community. He
now lives in Foster City.

Scopazzi, the son of Italian
immigrants, has been on the road
with his one-man production from
Half Moon Bay to Benicia, and
was originally doing stand-up in
clubs with the likes of Robin
Williams, Jerry Seinfeld and Jay
Leno. He's done TV commercials
and industrial encephaloid jobs, but

finally quit stand-up to sink his
teeth into something with more
substance.

"It's difficult to discuss the
human condition when you've got
a bunch of guys doing shots in the
front row at the club, who came to
heckle the comic," Scopazzi said.

The former Special Education
teacher admits that he'd rather do
something more than talk about
sex and dating. Instead, he cracks
jokes about the suburban life of the
Costco generation, who, says Sco-
pazzi, act as if they're shopping

"for a nuclear holocaust."

One such joke aimed at the
Costco crowd is that in 50 years he
predicts a scene where an old man
is telling his grandchild the story of
how he once bought toilet paper at
Costco.

"Yep, and I haven't bought a roll
since," heamed the grandfather.
Scopazzi's Italian roots and
strong family ties shine through his
material in tales that often describe
his total absence during his life as

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BOTTG

Continued from page A1

an over-burdened, over-mortgaged
father and husband in the suburbs.
Throughout "Outer Mission, Mid-
dle Class," Scopazzi repeats the
theme of the importance of family.
He credits his 30-year-old grand-
mother, still living in the Outer
Mission, for his sense of humor.

The San Francisco Chronicle
gave "Outer Mission, Middle
Class" a thumbs-up, saying "Both
on stage and in private, Scopazzi is
clearly proud of his Italian-Ameri-

can heritage, even while working it
for laughs. Mostly, though, Sco-
pazzi is just very funny."

"Outer Mission, Middle Class"
will appear for two weekends only,
May 8 through 17. May 8, 9 and
15 are 8 p.m. cocktail shows, tick-
ets are \$12. Mother's Day, May 10,
features a mom's brunch at noon,
with showtime at 1 p.m.; tickets are
\$25 with catering by Antonette's
Cucina. Sunday, May 17 is a 4 p.m.
matinee for \$12.

Call 746-1269 for information
and reservations. Tickets will also
be sold at the door. All shows will
be presented at the BDES Hall,
140 West J Street.



Dan Scopazzi

Scopazzi brings one-man show to Benicia

By MARK MAZZAFERRO
Times-Herald staff writer

Dan Scopazzi is a lot like
most middle class Italian
kids who grew up in San
Francisco in the 1960s. His father
was a waiter. His mother was a
homemaker. He went to Catholic
school. His neighborhood was
filled with kids of every color.

But most local kids don't end
up spending time in Las Vegas
hotel rooms between appearances
at high-tech trade shows.

That's where Scopazzi was
Monday as he discussed his
upcoming one-man show "Outer
Mission, Middle Class" in
Benicia over the next two week-
ends.

"My show deals with all that,"
Scopazzi said of the focus of his
performances. "Growing up in
the outer Mission, living with
Italian immigrants. My father
worked as a waiter all his life, my
mom stayed at home with five
kids."

Naturally, Scopazzi — who
used to work under the stage
name Don St. Paul — wants to
draw a response from his audi-
ence as much as the next guy, but
his show is more than a laughfest.

"It's not all comedy," the 44-
year-old said. "It's ever changing.
My show is about my growing
up, my parents being from the old
country and how that affects your
life growing up."

He estimates that 30,000 people

his act doesn't have it's funnier
moments.

Scopazzi's done it all in the
comedy world, it seems. He start-
ed as a member of the comedy
team Murphy St. Paul with Sue
Murphy, then moved to Los
Angeles to begin his solo career.
He has been on "everything on
Comedy Central," he says, and
even has an appearance in the
Robin Williams movie "Flubber"
to his credit.

His current act is pretty sim-
ple. He talks about his life as a
teenager growing up in the outer
Mission and compares it to his
life now as a husband and father.

"I wanted to be psychobolic,
my dad just wanted to go fish-
ing," he said of his times running
the streets of Sala Terrace. "My
father carried pictures in his wal-
let of juveniles, a 74-powder star-
geon and then there's his family."

Things weren't much different
for his mother, who had no trou-
ble at all in the kitchen — until it
came to an American favorite.

"My mother could do anything
but make a hamburger," Scopazzi
said with a laugh. "Europeans are
ground beef impaired. Our ham-
burgers had bread crumbs, crack-
er meal, they never came out
round. I get people coming up to
me saying, 'I'm Greek, and my
mom used to put cinnamon in my
hamburgers.'"

His act has been polished in
the city he grew up in, with a just

Bannan Place Theater in San
Francisco's North Beach. It's his
first time, playing his trade in
Benicia, though.

"There was a fellow who saw
me do the show, and he knew a
friend of a friend of mine affili-
ated with the Old Town Theatre,"
Scopazzi said of his venture into
the North Bay. "He thought it
would be great."

Scopazzi will perform in
Benicia this weekend and the

next, with shows scheduled for
May 8-10 and May 15-17. May 8,
9 and 15 are 8 p.m. cocktail
shows and cost \$12. Sunday's
show is a special Mother's Day
brunch performance at 1 p.m.,
\$25; and Sunday, May 17 is a 4
p.m. matinee, \$12.

The shows will take place at
the BDES Hall, 140 West J St.,
Benicia.

For more information and
reservations, call 746-1269.

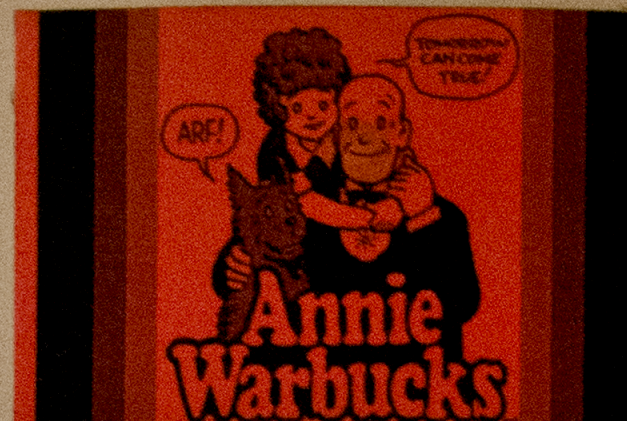


MAGGIE CRUM
On the Aisle

PICK OF THE WEEK — You
may call him a stand-up comedian
who delights in making audiences
laugh, but Dan Scopazzi also
touches the heart in his one-man
show "Outer Mission, Middle
Class." His current run will have
its final performance at 4 p.m.
Sunday at the Benicia Old Town
Theatre, 140 West J St., Benicia.

Now in his mid-40s, Scopazzi
tells what it was like growing up in
San Francisco's Outer Mission, the
son of Italian immigrants, whom he
pictures so vividly you almost feel
you're part of his spunky, closely
knit family. He's full of wonderful
stories about his days in a Catholic
school, his adored grandparents
and his father, who worked a 12-
hour day as a waiter. He's proud of
his heritage, he's proud to be an
American, and his wry humor guar-
antees a hilarious afternoon. For
tickets, call 707-746-1269.

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
PROUDLY PRESENTS
THE FALL 1998 PRODUCTION:



DAILY REPUBLIC — Tuesday, Oct.
10-24-98

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Warm, witty 'Warbucks'

Sequel to 'Annie'
good as original

By Nancy Bolyard
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Directed by Kathryn G. McCarthy, and choreographed by Kris Mueller, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's interpretation of "Annie Warbucks," the musical sequel to "Annie," was a splendid combination of lively, upbeat music, comedy, political jokes, corruption and romance. Singing songs such as "The Other Woman," the orphan girls brought laughter and smiles to the audience. Jessica Haburchak of Concord shined in her starring role as little orphan Annie. It was amazing to see such a young girl with so much talent. Her voice was incredibly moving.

The story begins on Christmas Eve, where the first "Annie" ends. Tomorrow has finally arrived for Annie. However, despite all the wealth, Annie soon realizes that money doesn't solve her problems. Miss Hannigan, the orphanage director, is out of the picture, and tucked safely away in prison. But a new villainess is there to take her place. Her name is Commissioner Doyle (Shari Oret) from the child welfare agency. And her business is to take Annie from Warbucks — since he's not married. But more than that, she has a plan to get her grip on Warbucks' money. Her secret agenda is what adds a couple of interesting twists to the plot. Of course, these twists can't be revealed, as to not ruin the surprises. So, while she sends Warbucks out searching for a wife, in order to keep Annie, Grace (Kristina Crowley) who is in love with Warbucks, goes unnoticed, despite Annie's attempts to get Warbucks and Grace together.

The casting for this crew was excellent. Jay Clifton, who plays Daddy Warbucks, bears a marked resemblance to his character. While there's little business left in the billionaire tycoon, due to Annie's charms, Annie's character is still bubbly, high-spirited, and optimistic, yet tough.

Haburchak was perfect in her role as Annie. But the smallest member of the acting crew stole the show. Kelsey Miller of Napa, playing C.G. Paterson, was surprisingly comfortable, and confident on stage, despite her character's nervous habits: biting her toenails, and constantly scratching her face.

Ella and Alvin Paterson (Krisay Wall, and Mike Null) were good too. Null was extremely funny, and Wall had an excellent voice which was exemplified in her melodious song, "Love." Oret gave an outstanding performance. Not only was her singing voice strong, but she was very funny too. She scared the daylights out of the orphans when she yelled and stomped her foot, sending the girls scattering. She held nothing back when playing the wicked role, such as when she warned Warbucks he was running out of time to find a wife, and then snidely piped up, "tick, tick, tick."

And then there was Mark Wininger as Franklin Roosevelt. He was another ope who had the audience buzzing with laughter, especially after the jazzy musical number, "All dolled up." After the others sang "All dolled up" with great enthusiasm, he wheeled himself to the back of the stage, repeating the words,



A cast of orphans surround Concord resident Jessica Haburchak, at top, center, who plays Annie in the production.

■ ANNIE WARBUCKS

Where: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
When: 8 p.m. Cocktail shows (doors open at 7 p.m.), Oct. 30 and Nov. 6, 13 and 20, 8 p.m. Dinner shows (dinner served at 7 p.m.), Oct. 31 and Nov. 7, 14, and 21, 4 p.m. Matinee cocktail shows (doors open at 7 p.m.), Nov. 1, 8 and 15.
Where: B.O.T.T. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia, 746-1289.
Prices: Dinner shows, \$27; cocktail shows \$14 for adults, \$12 for seniors over 62 and children 13-18; children under 13 are \$8.

"all dolled up" in a dry monotone.

All of the orphans did an outstanding job, and of course, seeing the tremendous talent from all of the children in the performance, was the best part. Other child players include: Michelle Hayward Senbury (Pepper), Laura Thur (Molly), Kimberly Tanner (orphan), Katie Miller (orphan), Amanda Gamblin (Gladys), Corrie Stallings (Tessie), Kerry Wininger (Peaches), Kaylyn Peterson (Miss Lillianthal, Harriet), and Amelia Gonsalves (orphan). Sandy was per-

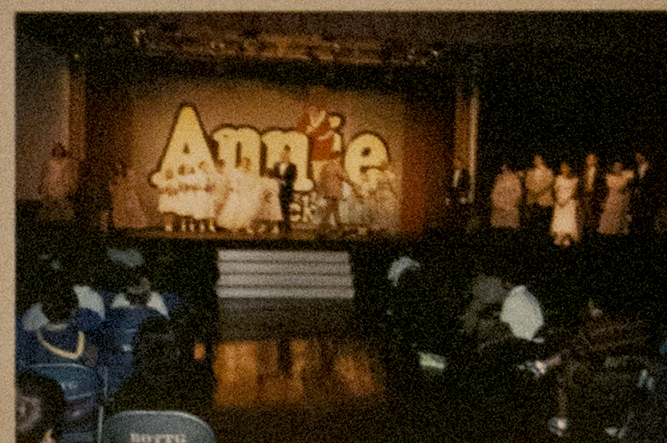
formed by Sparky.

The lighting was decent throughout the production. An especially effective scene to watch was when Annie and her dog Sandy hitched a ride on the handcart. The green lighting mixed with the fog was a creative touch for the nighttime scene.

The set and costumes were bright and cheerful, which worked very well for the mood of the play. The set switched from different rooms in the mansion, to Roosevelt's office, and the "outdoors" seen when Annie runs away. The costumes were extensive, with a wide range of style. There were the rags worn by the orphans, the glamorous gowns when everyone was "dolled up" and the billionaire business attire.

"Annie Warbucks" is a fast-paced musical packed with lots of fun and surprises for the entire family. Although there were a couple of botched lines, probably due to opening night jitters, the overall performance ran smoothly.

Nancy Bolyard is a local theater reviewer.





JESSICA HABURCHAK (ANNIE)



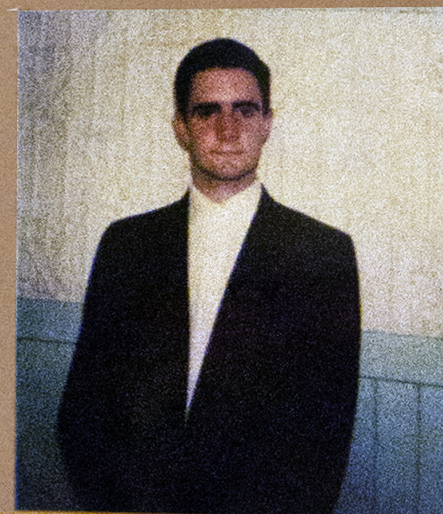
JAY CLIFTON (OLIVER WARBUCKS)



ELIZABETH MITCHELL (MRS KELLY)



KRISTINA CROWLEY (GRACE)



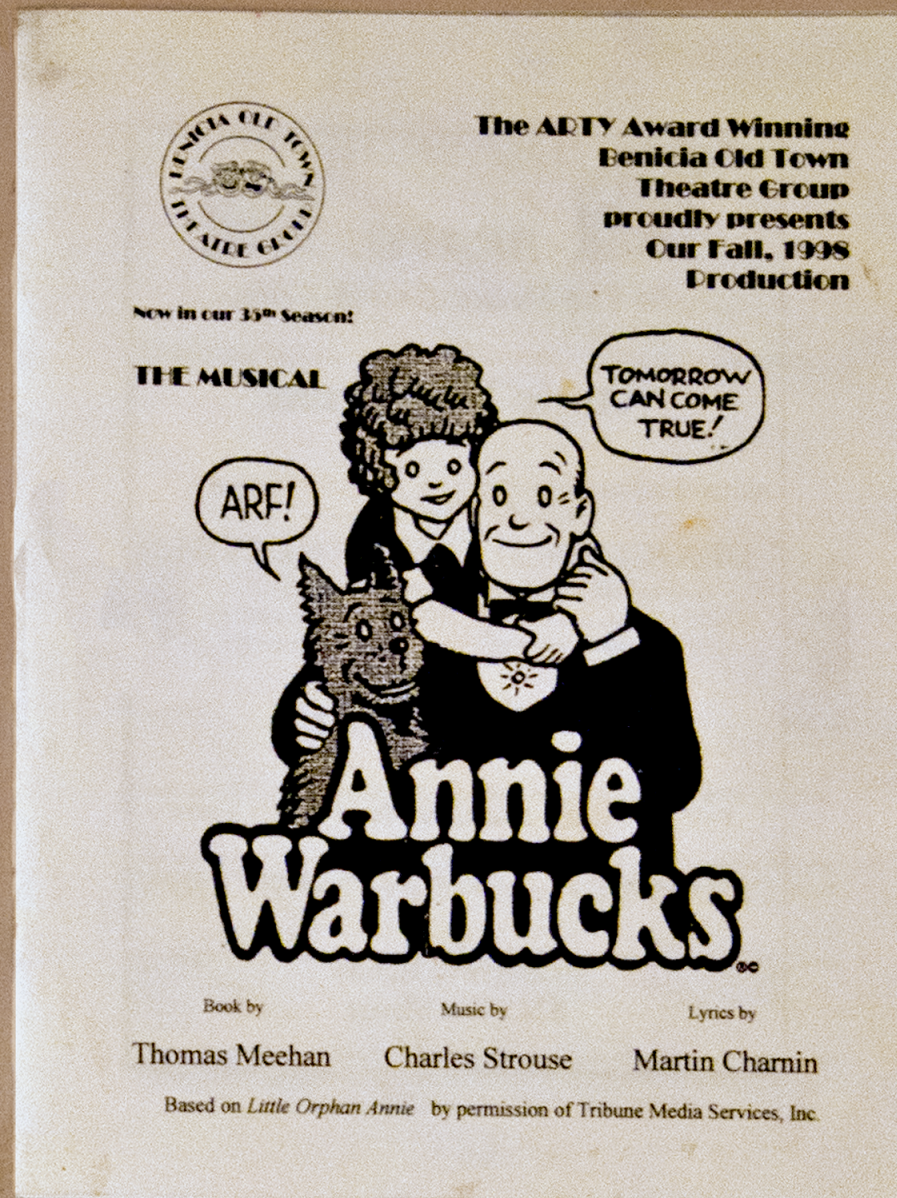
MIKE NULL (ALVIN, SERVANT)

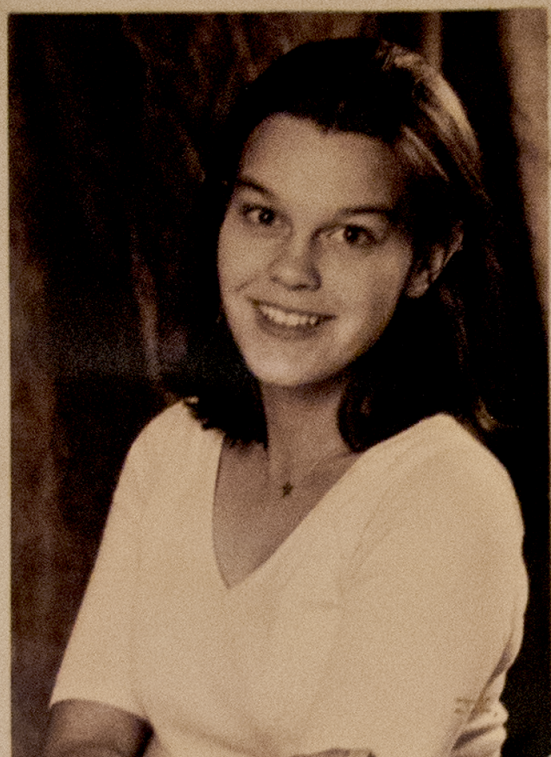


SPARKY (SANDY)



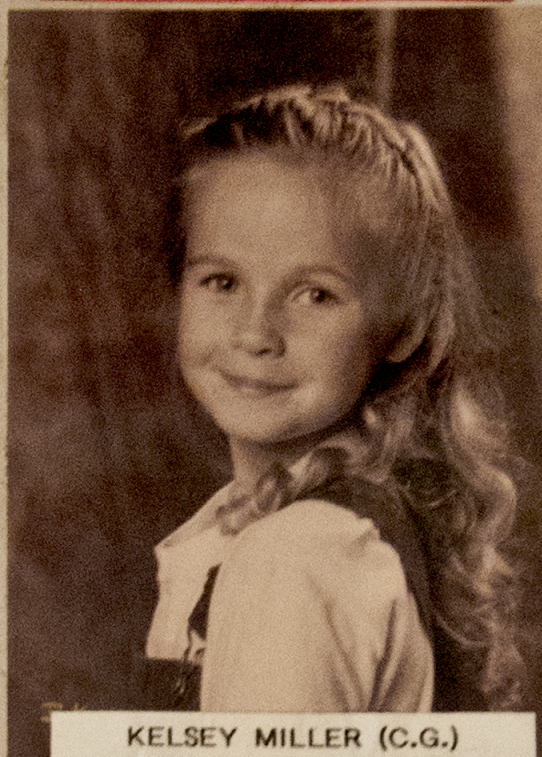
BENJI (SANDY)





KRISSY WALL (ELLA, SERVANT)

Annie Warbucks



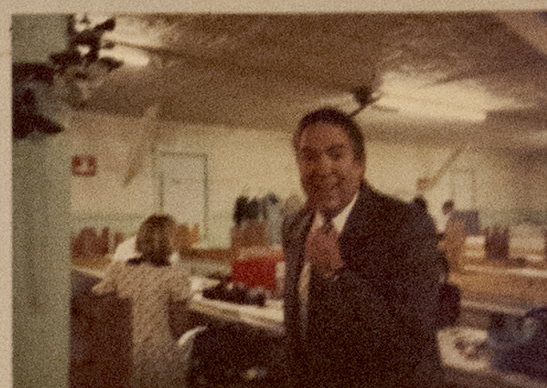
KELSEY MILLER (C.G.)



AMANDA GAMBLIN (GLADYS, ENSEMBLE)



KAYLYN PETERSON
(LILLIANTHAL, SERVANT)



AMELIA GONSALVES (ORPHAN)



SARAH BERNARD

(DR. WHITTLEBY, SERVANT)



DANIEL ALLEN (SERVANT, ENSEMBLE)



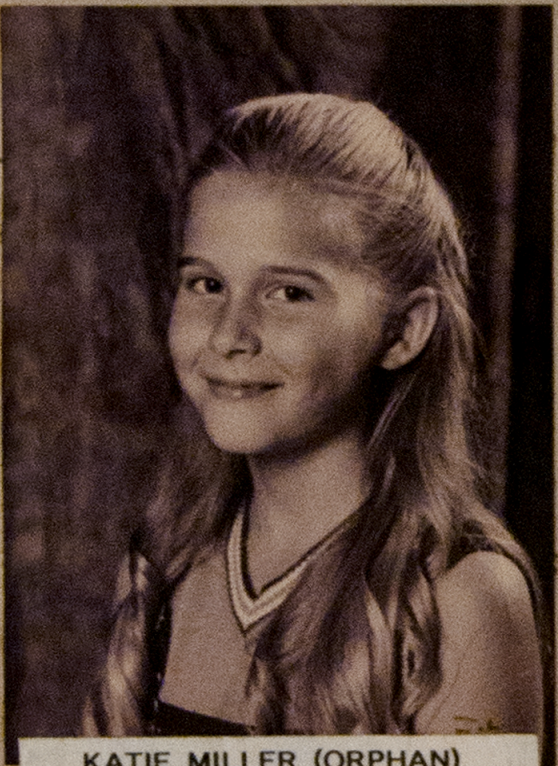
LAURA THUR (MOLLY)



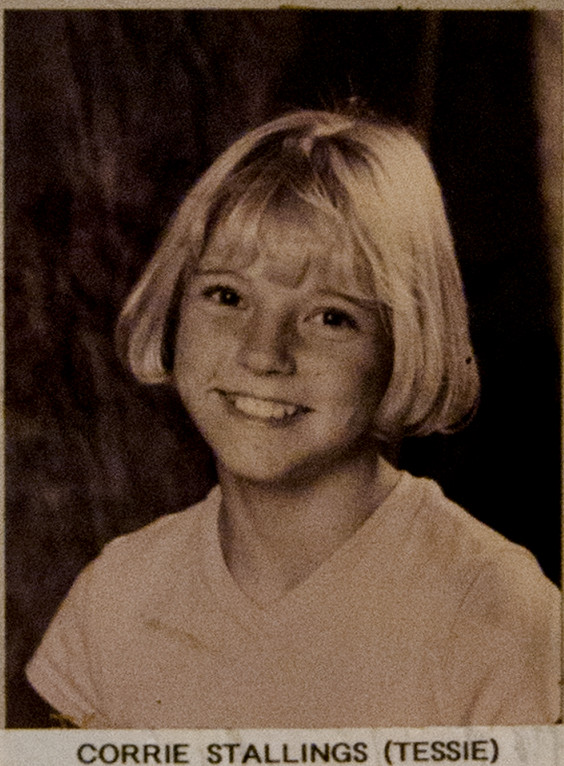
MICHELLE SEABURY (PEPPER)



KIMBERLY TANNER (ORPHAN)



KATIE MILLER (ORPHAN)



CORRIE STALLINGS (TESSIE)



PAT RAMS (MRS PUGH)



Annie Warbucks



KATHY MCCARTY (DIRECTOR)



KRISTY JULIANO (MUSICAL DIRECTOR)



KRIS MUELLER (CHOREOGRAPHER)



BARBARA MCFADDEN (COSTUMER)





COURTESY PHOTO
Mark Inglis, top, and Eddie Ferreira
play Jerry and Joe in "Sugar."

A spoonful of 'Sugar' is just right

By Judith Faught
OAKLAND TRIBUNE

BENICIA — Steve Kinsella is not a
paid-back director.

"I think I scared them in the begin-
ning," the Walnut Creek resident said
of his cast of "Sugar." "I demand a high
level in the first 10 days, instead of
waiting until
tech week to get
everything done.
I think actors
enjoy being chal-
lenged."

PREVIEW
'Sugar'
BENICIA OLD TOWN
THEATRE GROUP

8 P.M. SATURDAY AND
ON FRIDAYS THROUGH
MAY 14-4 P.M.

SUNDAYS THROUGH
MAY 22; 6:30 P.M.

FOR SATURDAY
DINNER SHOWS APRIL
17 THROUGH MAY 15

B.D.E.S. HALL,
140 WEST J. ST.,
BENICIA

\$20 OPENING NIGHT
CHAMPAGNE-
DESSERT

RECEPTION; \$27
SATURDAY DINNER
SHOW

PERFORMANCES:
ALL OTHER

PERFORMANCES ARE
\$14 FOR ADULTS,
\$12 FOR SENIORS 62

AND OVER AND
STUDENTS 13-18;
\$8 FOR CHILDREN

UNDER 12
746-1269

"I know direc-
tors who will say,
"By the second
weekend (of per-
formances) we'll
have it," he said.

In fact, the
cast was peaking
so quickly that
Kinsella gave the
cast a virtually
unheard of two

nights off from scheduled rehearsals.

"Sugar," is based on the Marilyn
Monroe comedy, "Some Like It Hot." It
follows two down-and-out musicians
who witness a gangland murder in
Chicago. To hide from the mob, Joe
(played by Eddie Ferreira of Crockett)

and Jerry (played by Mark Inglis of
Danville) transform themselves into
Josephine and Daphne and join an all-
girls jazz band.

They both end up smitten by the
featured singer, Sugar (played by
Rebecca Hamill of Benicia, and by
Marilyn Monroe in the movie). Joe
decides to somehow win her heart.

Jerry, meanwhile is trying to deal with
an unwanted suitor, millionaire

Osgood Fielding (played by Al
Guaraglia of Pinole). Eventually
everything gets sorted out, but
not before some hilarious
moments ensue.

"If you need a laugh, this is
the show," Kinsella said.

After seeing and hearing the
actors deliver their lines, he still
finds himself laughing out loud.

"That's a good sign," Kinsella
said.

Kinsella, who makes his
Benicia Old Town Theatre
Group debut with the show,
wanted to direct "Sugar"

because he thought he could
bring out the genuine comedy of
the play, rather than relying on
gags.

"This comedy is an extremely
difficult one to do tastefully,"
Kinsella said. "If you wanted to
go cheap, there's a million
opportunities."

He believes the show has a
lot of quality comedy that people
can appreciate.

It has good music, too," he
said.

The past few months have
been a whirlwind for Kinsella.



BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
PROUDLY PRESENTS
THE 35TH SEASON - SPRING 1999
PRODUCTION:



A MUSICAL COMEDY

BASED ON THE FILM - "SOME LIKE IT HOT"

BOOK BY PETER STONE - MUSIC BY JULE STYNE - LYRICS BY BOB MERRILL
DIRECTED BY STEVE KINSELLA - CHOREOGRAPHY BY JEFF TEAGUE - MUSIC DIRECTION BY MICHELLE GAINES
COSTUMES BY LYNNE COOMBS - PRODUCTION DESIGN & TECHNICAL DIRECTION BY DOUG HAM



THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 1999

Solano Times

Serving Benicia and Vallejo

How sweet it is—backstage with 'Sugar'

By Janet Kettelhut
Staff writer

Backstage with the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. The cast is high on sugar—celebrating a 35th season with a musical comedy based on the hit Billy Wilder movie, "Some Like It Hot." This one is called "Sugar."

It runs weekends through May 15 at the B.D.E.S. Hall in Benicia.

"Sugar" is about two down-and-out musicians who, by some dreadful mistake, witness a gangland murder in Chicago. To escape the mob, they put on dresses, lipstick and wigs to become Josephine and Daphne, and get hired by an all-girls jazz band. They take off for Florida and in the process get acquainted with Sugar, who in the Benicia production is played by Rebecca Hamill.

The play turns on a kind of old-fashioned deception. Josephine is really Joey. Does Sugar know this? Maybe not, but she falls in love with him anyway. Meanwhile—and there are a lot of meanwhiles and plot turns in this sugary concoction—Daphne, who is really Jerry, has attracted the attention of millionaire Osgood Fielding. It's wacky, it's fun, it's a lot of hard work.

The only difference between this and doing a professional production is that you won't get paid," director Steve Kinsella of Walnut Creek tells his cast.

All of the actors and most of the behind-the-scenes people are volunteers. But they work long hours.

"It's like having two full-time jobs," says said Elizabeth Mitchell, who plays Sweet Sue. She listens to her lines on tape as she prepares to work at Principia, California Realty.

Kinsella is also a voice teacher and performing musician. He feels part of his role is to help actors develop their talents. Some lessons go beyond the stage and may last a lifetime.

"I think they have a lot more empathy for what their wives go through," says costume designer Lynn Comb.

"It's so cold in a dress," says Mark Inglis of Danville, who plays Daphne.

"The hardest thing is shaving my legs," says Eddie Ferreira of Crockett, who plays Josephine. "When those mubs grow in I will never complain about it to my wife again."

On stage, the men make sweet sounds together, even though they come from different backgrounds.

Ferreira had been acting ever since high school. He studied theater arts at San Jose State and became a resident director and playwright at the Opera House in San Jose. He directed high school drama and community theater, and worked as a professional actor on stage in San Francisco.

"I made a living but I couldn't buy a house or a new car," he says. "I wanted the American dream."

So five years ago, he went back to college at night, earned another degree, and is now a regional manager for a health information company.

His stage partner, Inglis, is a hydrogeologist who works at a Martinez refinery and had no acting experience. He just started taking voice lessons, a 16th anniversary gift from his wife.

"I wanted to do creative work," says the 40-year-old.

He pulls off his first stage performance with the aplomb of a veteran.

"Sugar" may not be Broadway, but 20-year-old Rebecca Hamill hopes it leads there. She auditions every chance she gets—for "Rent" and



in Kirkham, reflected in mirror, who plays Viola, and Mimi Hamilton, who plays Olga, prepare their hair for the wigs they wear in "Sugar."

Beach Blanket Babylon"—and hopes to get discovered.

"I don't ever want a real job again," says the Benicia High School graduate. "I just want to act."

But Hamill knows that even if she doesn't make it to Broadway, there will always be community theater.

That is where Elizabeth Mitchell has found a home.

"I feel alive on stage and in the theater," says Mitchell.

She is the granddaughter of John and Ruth Chamberlain, among the co-founders of the Vallejo Musical Theater. She has been performing most of her life.

She won best actress in the ARTY awards, Solano County's equivalent to the Tonys or Oscars. She even has a following of people from the Russian River and Solano County who attend all of her performances.

"I like to help people forget about the problems in their lives," she says. "Coming to

the theater is like taking a mental vacation."

Lafayette's Dave Pinkim plays a gangster, an out-of-work musician and a lecherous millionaire. Pinkim says acting is a good balance for his life as a husband, father and technical manager for computer sales support.

"It is fulfilling and an opportunity to just let it all hang out," he says.

"There are really no other opportunities to do that in my family, church or company. I find emotions that I don't ever use other places."

The cast develops a special bond working so intensely over several months. "You become a family," says Mitchell. "You work so closely together you develop a trust."

Performances are Friday and Saturday evenings through May 15 at 8 p.m., and Sunday afternoons through May 2 at 4 p.m. Friday and Sunday performances are \$14 for adults, \$12 for students ages 13-18 and seniors 62 and over, and \$8 for children 12 and under. Saturday night dinner theater performances are \$27. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Dinners are catered by Antoinette's Cucina of Benicia. The B.D.E.S. Hall is located at 140 West J St. in Benicia. For reservations and group discounts, call 746-1269.



Rebecca Hamill belts out a tune as Sugar.



MAGGIE CRUM
On the Aisle

Benicia

Outstanding tap-dancing make this musical set in the Depression worth seeing

CELEBRATING ITS 35th season, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is truly unique. Housed on the second floor of the B.D.E.S. Hall, the company does two full-scale productions every season. In the last 10 years, productions have ranged from "Love Letters," "Annie," "Wait Until Dark" and "Jake's Women" to "A Chorus Line." What's more, Benicia has the honor of operating the longest-running dinner theater in the state of California.

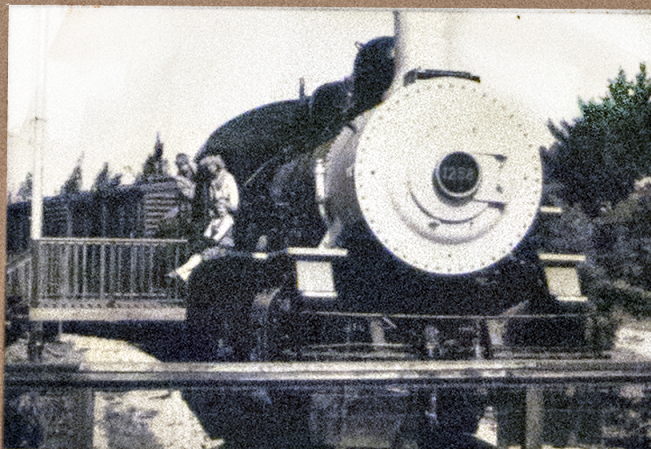
This spring's attraction is "Sugar," a musical by Julie Styne and lyricist Bob Merrill, based on the film "Some Like It Hot." The director is Steve Kinsella, who is well known in Contra Costa, and the choreographer is Jeff Tongue.

Set in the depths of the Depression, the story follows an all-women band from Chicago to Florida as they try to find riches and husbands. The first act, hampered by a recalcitrant sound system, moved a bit slowly, but the second act was so full of fun, surprises and nifty tap-dancing that the audience was captivated.

The biggest rounds of applause went to the woeful men (Eddie Ferreira and Mark Inglis), who had witnessed a gang massacre and are disguised in drag, and to Sugar (Rebecca Hamill), who shows sparks when she meets a millionaire—bogus, to be sure. For tickets through May 14, call 707-746-1269.



Eddie Ferreira (left) and Mark Inglis perform a scene from "Sugar."



'Sugar' sings with style

Characters propel fun musical set in 1920s

By Nancy Bolyard
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group put on a polished and entertaining performance Saturday night with its rendition of "Sugar," a musical comedy written by Peter Stone, with music by Jule Styne and lyrics by Bob Merrill.

"Sugar," directed by Steve Kinsella, is based on the movie, "Some Like it Hot," by Billy Wilder and L.L.A. Diamond. The play contains a wealth of fun antics, including tap-dancing bandits and two very silly characters.

Eddie Ferreira and Mark Ingals play two of the main characters: Joe Josephine and Jerry Daphne, respectively. Joe and Jerry are musicians down on their luck and trying desperately to find work. The two witness a murder when they stumble across a clandestine card game. When the bandits get antitracked, the two musicians don't waste a second in making their escape.

In order to hide from the killers, they disguise themselves as women and join an all women's traveling band. Joe becomes Josephine, and Jerry becomes Daphne. Soon, the pair are led on an amusing journey of silly love affairs as they head away from Chicago.

The play is full of funny moments including the time when Jerry and Sugar (Rebecca Hamill) sit in the top bunk next to each other. Jerry, who resembles a baby bird in bad need of a shave, and sports a blond wig, and a dress, sits next to Sugar, an attractive blonde.

When the two decide to have a nightcap, Jerry is so flustered by Sugar's presence, he can hardly see straight. Flirting Sugar irresistible, Jerry's ready to reveal his secret identity. As Sugar heads for her bunk to get the liquor, Jerry informs her that this



Some funny antics in "Sugar" take place on the train.

could turn into a surprise party.

In their musical number, "We Could Be Close," the two sit on the edge of the bunk, swinging their legs. Ingals' face is funny. His big eyes widen and his lips purse as he tries to remain feminine.

But Jerry is no match for Joe. In order to obtain Sugar's affection, Joe once again goes incognito. Only this time he's a millionaire — something Sugar craves in her ideal man. In using reverse psychology, Joe has his way with her by pretending to not be interested.

Al Guaraglia plays Osgood Fielding. As a hopeless romantic, his seventh divorce has just been finalized, and Osgood doesn't waste anytime in his hot pursuit of Daphne. Osgood was so convincing in his pursuit of Daphne that

Jerry begins to believe he's ready to get married. The two dance around the stage. Guaraglia's look of sincere love, and Ingals' lovestruck expression are amusing as the two twirl around the stage together.

Another moment that has the audience laughing (especially the children) is the scene in which Jerry and Joe struggle to remove their women's clothing as they get ready for bed. They tug and pull until one of the bras snaps from being stretched over the top of Jerry's head.

The music is fun and very involved with the plot, almost to the point where it isn't even noticeable because the music is just as interesting and fun as the plot, dialogue and characters. The music doesn't break up the plot like it does in other musicals. It runs

REVIEW
'Sugar'
BENICIA OLD TOWN
THEATRE GROUP
PRODUCTION
8 P.M. FRIDAYS THROUGH MAY 14,
4 P.M. SUNDAYS THROUGH MAY 22,
6:30 P.M. FOR SATURDAY DINNER
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746-1269

very smoothly.

The 16-song musical play is constantly entertaining. In one seductive musical number, "Tears the Town Apart," the tap-dancing "Spats" gang sings with semi-automatic machine guns in tote. The way they dance with their guns creates an image of the introduction to some of the older James Bond movies. Jerry Wehry sings the lead in this number as he's also the leader of the gang. His soft voice distinguishes him as a cool crook with rhythm and style. While his song and dance are fun to watch, it goes on a little too long. Another number that goes on a little too long was "November Song."

The costumes are cute, and true to the '20s period. From flashy dresses to jazzy suits, the characters are depicted well through their attire.

Nothing much can be said for the lighting. It's just there, and the set was ordinary without any cause to be otherwise. It's the storyline, and funny, well-rounded characters that make the play well worth watching.

The performance is polished. The actors know their lines well. However, there were some huge distractions due to technical difficulty during this particular performance. The heavy static from the speakers and the variation in the microphone volume were distracting.

Sugar is a play the entire family will love to see.

Nancy Bolyard is a local



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DRIVING MISS DAISY



For a trip to the South, see Old Town's 'Miss Daisy'

By RACHEL RASKIN-ZHIMEN
Special to the Times-Herald

BENICIA — In one of the season's best offerings in local community theater, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Driving Miss Daisy," succeeds in transporting its audience to the deep south, and introducing it to the wonderfully complex characters of this Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Alfred Uhry.

If you choose the Saturday night dinner theater presentation, you can almost detect the fragrance of gladulins on a warm southern breeze, as you enjoy a south-inspired meal catered by Antonette's Cucina of Benicia. Sipping on a mint julep and listening to the strains of Southern jazz in the background, the atmosphere is nearly complete, even before the play begins.

With a clever use of space, and authentic early 1950s furniture and props, "Driving Miss Daisy" tells the story of the unlikely relationship between an aging, crotchety Southern white lady, and the proud, self-spoken African American man hired as her chauffeur against her wishes.

The BOTTG's production of "Driving Miss Daisy" features effective sound and lighting effects, skillful direction by Rachel Hansen, and inspired performances by Helen Means, Fred Lockett and Andy Shapiro.

The quality of the work by everyone connected with this production should come as no surprise when you consider the amount of experience and expertise each brings to this theatrical effort.

Hansen has been involved in all aspects of the theater for nearly 20 years, beginning as a child actor, and progressing to the point where she was hired as artistic director for ABC Productions. "The Trial of Mother Goose," and she has directed more plays, primarily at the Motaga Playhouse, than you can shake a stick at.

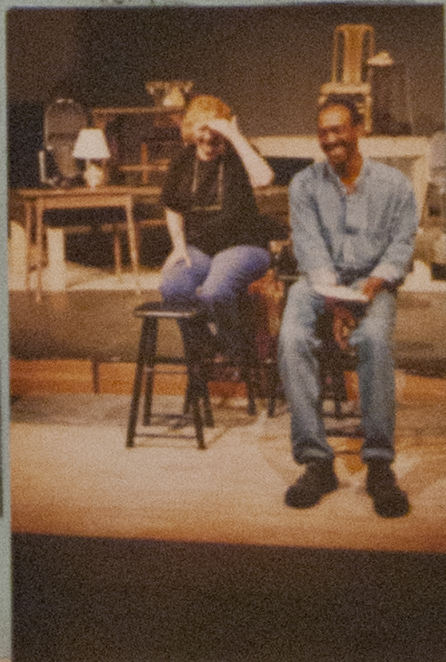
Means plays Miss Daisy with such believable irascibility, and seems actually to age before your eyes during the play's 25 year span. She is founder, producer and artistic director of Onstage Theater in Pleasant Hill. She has produced over 100 productions, directed more than 60 plays and musicals and been involved with theater in many capacities since the late 1950s. Lockett, who plays

chauffeur Hoke Colburn with an air of quiet dignity, is an accomplished actor, as is Shapiro, who ably portrays Miss Daisy's son Boolie.

The play, which begins in Atlanta in 1948, touches on the prevailing plights and prejudices against African-Americans and Jews in the deep south, as well being a heart-warming study of the bond created over time between the two main characters. As amusing as often as it is poignant, "Driving Miss Daisy" is a powerful piece and well worth the price of the ticket.

□ The BOTTG's production runs now through Nov. 21. For reservations, call 746-1269, or visit <http://members.aol.com/botbg99a/wh>.

Vol 40 Times Herald Nov 12, 1999





Old Town Theatre drives Miss Daisy

By Janet Kettelhut
Staff writer

There's no business like show business. No matter what happens, the show must go on. But when a lead actor quits the week before the show opens, that's crisis time.

That's what happened to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

"Driving Miss Daisy" was supposed to open Oct. 15. Instead it was delayed one week, until the new male lead of Hoke, played by Fredric Lockett, could drive Miss Daisy.

The show runs through Sunday, Nov. 21. Actors are used to the unexpected. They keep acting when the earth quakes and when the power fails. But when a lead quits, that's another story. And this is what happened, when the

first Hoke realized the play was "taking too much time." "I panicked," said director Rachel Hauser. "It had never happened (to me) in 20 years of theater."

Luckily, Miss Daisy saved the day. Actress Helen Means, who has been artistic director and producer at Onstage Theatre in Pleasant Hill for the past 22 years, recalled an actor from a general audition who so impressed her that she kept his name and number.

Enter Lockett, who had played the role of Hoke, Miss Daisy's driver, three other times.

But Hauser wanted to make sure she had someone who could step in with only a week or two left of rehearsals and understand the emotional depth required for the role.

"Hoke ages from 65 to 85, and he deals with an extremely prejudiced woman," said

Helen Means, above, playing Miss Daisy Wertham in "Driving Miss Daisy," reviews her lines during dress rehearsal; above left, Means and Fredric Lockett as her driver, Hoke, play off each other. The play opened last weekend to rave reviews and performances continue through Nov. 21.

Hauser.

The play spans 15 years, from a few years after the end of World War II until 1973.

Daisy is a 72-year-old Southern white woman who crashes her car. Daisy's son, played by Andy Shapiro, forbids her to drive. Instead he hires Hoke, a black man, as her driver. Daisy is a proud woman who does not want to accept anyone's help, but over the years Daisy and Hoke cross the racial lines of the time and develop a deep bond of friendship. Hoke grows to understand Daisy better than anyone.

"They are wonderful friends who in those days would have no business being friends," said Hauser.

Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman played the Hollywood version, for which Tandy received the Oscar for best actress.

"But we offer more of a simple, real-life version," said Hauser.

And the play has felt the pressures of real-life deadlines.

Lockett learned his lines in only three days, something that usually takes a non-professional three weeks.

"I've been called in often to do last minute stints," he said.

"He gives (Means) a lot to work with," said Hauser. "It will be a far superior show (than it would have been as originally cast). We turned a negative into such an extreme positive."

Lockett, 46, has more acting experience than the man originally chosen to play the role. Lockett started acting when he was 6 years old and continued until he graduated from high school. He took a break until 13 years ago, when he started acting at the Black

Drive on down

What: "Driving Miss Daisy," performed by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.
When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday evenings, through Nov. 21; 4 p.m. Sunday afternoons. Closed for Halloween weekend, Oct. 29-31. Doors open one hour before curtain and at 6:30 p.m. for dinner show.
Where: 8015 Hill, 140 West J St., Benicia.
Cost: Friday and Sunday \$14 for adults, \$12 for students (13-18) and seniors (62 and over), \$8 for children 12 and under. Saturday dinner-theater performances are \$27. Directors by Artistic Director Rachel Hauser.
Information: 746-1269.

Repertory Theatre in Berkeley. He has been an extra in movies, has acted in industrial training films and in advertising. Lately he has done little acting while he worked to support his family. He has done enough paid professional acting that he is a candidate for membership in the Actor's Equity union.

But this may be his last little theater performance. He has two young sons, ages 3 and 5, who need time and attention. He works for the family business managing property and restoring Victorians. He said he loves little theater, but wants to turn his creative energy to writing.

"Driving Miss Daisy" will also be a rare appearance for Means, 64, who usually works behind the scenes. She helped start Onstage Theatre 22 years ago. She began in theater as a child and took time off for mothering, acting on and off for 40 years.

Hauser expects audiences to be pleased.

"It's such a lovely story and these actors bring it to life," she said. "People will laugh, cry and get chills."

Solano Times Oct 26 1999



ANITA CRUZ/Solano Times



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THE TIMES • FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1999

HELEN MEANS, whose warm smile has welcomed thousands of theatergoers to her OnStage Theatre in Pleasant Hill for more than 20 years, is portraying a very different woman in "Driving Miss Daisy," the current attraction at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. As the 72-year-old woman who has just smashed her car, Means turns herself into a dour and bossy matriarch who snarls and glowers instead of smiling.

Alfred Uhry's play, set in the deep South in 1945, tells the story of Daisy, a wealthy Jewish widow, whose son Boolie (Andy Shapiro) hires an unemployed black man, Hoke (Fred Luckett), to serve as her chauffeur. Daisy, of course, is furious — but, in a series of revealing scenes spanning 25 years, the play is filled with warmth and humor. Despite mutual differences, Hoke and Daisy grow ever closer and more dependent on each other.

Directed by Rachel Hauser, it's a beautiful production, brought to life with unpretentious honesty.



MAGGIE CRUM
On the Aisle

The three actors are comfortable in their roles, and they capture the humor as well as the show's tenderness. By the end of the play, Miss Daisy is able to smile with all of Means' famous smile.

The Benicia company, founded in 1963, is unique in serving dinners before its Saturday night performances — a delightful accompaniment. Menus are keyed to the show and, as you might guess, "Daisy" is being honored with a Southern dinner. Performances will continue through Nov. 21 at the Old Town Theatre, 140 West J Street, Benicia. For tickets, call 707-746-1269.



Helen Means plays Miss Daisy Wertham, Andy Shapiro is her son, Boolie Wertham and Fred Luckett is her driver, Hoke Coburn.

'Driving' enjoyable, at times bumpy

By Maya Sullivan
OAKLAND PUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opened "Driving Miss Daisy" on Friday, starring Helen Means as Miss Daisy Wertham, Fred Luckett as Hoke Coburn and Andy Shapiro as Boolie Wertham, with Rachel Hauser directing.

Many of us are familiar with the Academy Award-winning film adaptation with Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman. It's the story of a deep, loving friendship that defies the social, religious and racial morays of its time.

Daisy Wertham is a 72-year-old widow living in 1940s Georgia. She has a strong personality — to put it mildly. She is crotchety and cantankerous, to put it honestly. But beneath her gruff exterior, we sense the pain of one who must grow old alone. We sense the fear of someone who is slowly losing the few things she has left, her health and her independence.

When we meet her, she is with her son, Boolie, a prominent local businessman, and their roles have been reversed. Boolie is lecturing his mother, who has just totaled a brand new automobile. This and a few other vehicle-related incidents have led him to conclude his mother should no longer drive, a conclusion that his mother doesn't take kindly. So when Boolie hires Hoke Coburn to drive Daisy, in spite of her objections, it's not exactly smooth sailing. However, over the next 25 years, their bickering turns to banter and their adversarial relationship into a deep friendship. Hauser's faithful adaptation of Alfred

REVIEW 'Driving Miss Daisy'

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
RUNS THROUGH NOV. 21
746-1269

★★★

(Two and one half stars out of four)

Uhry's Award-winning play is good, though not a tribute to the magic of live theater. The show has yet to gain the polish and smoothness required of a play with such a small cast. The road to opening night has been rocky. The actor who was to play Hoke quit the production a little over a week before the play was due to open. Hauser had to postpone the opening and cast, block and rehearse a new actor in less than three weeks. With such upheaval, it is understandable that there would be some problems. And there are.

For starters, there is Andy Shapiro's uneven performance as Boolie. The opening scenes had a couple of those deadly little pauses that let the audience know the actor has forgotten his next line or missed his cue. There was a tendency to speak over the lines of others and the awkward body language of an actor who couldn't decide what to do with his hands. However, his performance improved in subsequent scenes and by the end of the play he was fine. He is clearly a competent actor with a bad case of opening-night jitters.

Means' performance as Daisy Wertham was a treat. Although she created at least one of those deadly little pauses at the

beginning, her take on the frail but curmudgeonly Southern Jewish widow was fantastic. This role required her to age 25 years from the age of 72 to 97. And she did it perfectly with affectations laid on with a gentle hand. Does her hand tremble a little more now that she is in her 80s? Does it take just a little longer to rise from a chair? Means gives an understated performance which does not fail to show us the fear and growing affection for Hoke that lay beneath her character's prickly exterior. Wonderful.

Fred Luckett is in familiar territory as Hoke Coburn, having played this character in two other productions of "Driving Miss Daisy." Despite the shortness of time to prepare for the role, he shows us Hoke in all of his gentleness and irony. He is also required to do some aging of his own, which he does well. One of the things bound to impress is the wealth of meaning he can inject into the words, "Yesim."

His chemistry with Means is undeniable. It is in fact, the chemistry between the two lead characters that makes the evening worthwhile. We see the spark from the first moment they appear on stage together. And it just gets better. The play is further enhanced by Doug Hamis's set.

The final word is this: Yes the play is still a bit of a patchwork. There is little doubt many of the problems will disappear as the play continues its run. The charismatic performances of Means and Luckett are a strong draw.

Maya Sullivan is a local theater reviewer. You can e-mail her at axsull@aol.com.



BOTTG proves 'show must go on'

By Richard Toronto
HERALD STAFF WRITER

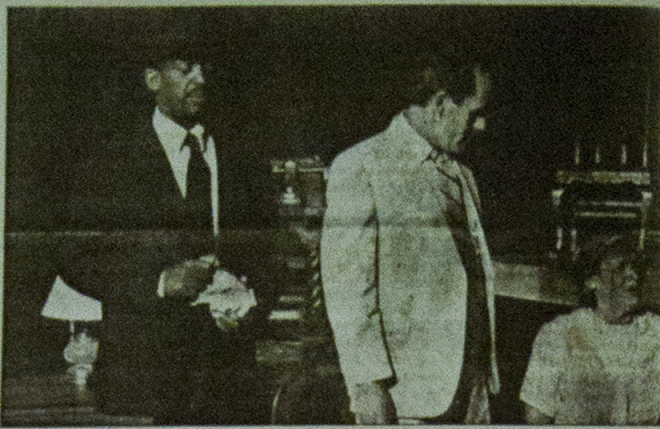
Though off to a shaky start with the surprise exit of one of its lead actors two weeks before opening night, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Driving Miss Daisy" is now up and running through Nov. 21 at the historic B.D.E.S. Hall on West J Street.

The show is Moraga director Rachel Hauser's BOTTG directorial debut, and according to 26-year-old Hauser, it almost didn't happen when the show's "chauffeur" walked out.

"I felt a lot of pressure to fill the part — I just wasn't willing to scrap the show," Hauser said. "This was my baby and I fought hard to keep it. This definitely taught me a lot about patience and negotiating skills."

Hauser, already a 20-year theater veteran, said the Benicia production will rate high on her list of life challenges. She managed to find Oakland actor Fred Luckett who, as it happened, had already played "Hoke," Miss Daisy's chauffeur, in three other community theater productions.

"The positive outcome from all this is we have a wonderful, tight cast that showed true professionalism throughout the



Fred Luckett (Hoke), Andy Shapiro (Bookie Werthan) and Helen Means (Miss Daisy Werthan) are the cast of "Driving Miss Daisy."

ordeal," Hauser said. "I had auditioned Fred Luckett earlier, but he didn't think he could do it — it was too far to travel from Oakland. I begged, I pleaded."

And Luckett accepted. Within a week, "Driving Miss Daisy" was back on the road, with Helen Means from Alamo sitting on the front seat next to Luckett as the cantankerous Miss Daisy.

"Fred is incredible — wonderful to be on stage with," Means

said. "When you get to work with someone you're in tune with, you react to what they're saying so much better. That's what acting is — listening and reacting to your partner."

Driving Miss Daisy centers around an elderly Southern woman who loses her drivers license due to another of many car accidents. Against her wishes, her son hires Hoke, a black chauffeur. Through the years, the unlikely

couple of Hoke and Miss Daisy gradually builds to friendship, though it's definitely a rocky road for Miss Daisy.

"One thing is, she always says she isn't prejudiced, but actually she is," Means said. "She does grow because of relationship, and by the end of the play much of that disappears. He becomes her best friend. It's a love story, love

See BOTTG, Page A2

BOTTG

Continued from Page A1

between two good friends."

Means herself has become something of a theater icon during her 40-year involvement in Contra Costa community theater. She is founder and artistic director of OnStage Theatre, now going into its 20th year.

"I've been in theater on and off during those 40 years," she said. "When the children were small, I stopped. But I was involved with the Little Repertory Company before there was an ACT. We were just ahead of our time."

Means decided to audition for the role of Miss Daisy when Hauser mentioned the part was coming up. It was Means' first audition in some time, she said, and after setting aside notions of an already full schedule, accepted Hauser's offer to try out.

"I love working with Rachel,

and I like the (BOTTG people)," Means said. "They are a great group, and so congenial. Our theater groups are similar, in that we're community based and mostly run by volunteers. (BOTTG's former president) Doug Ham directed for us many years ago."

Hauser began her directing career at age 14, and for 12 years worked almost exclusively in children's theater. She learned her craft while working for the Moraga Playhouse, discovering the challenges of working with small children.

"It's especially challenging when they don't read," Hauser said. "You do very basic plays that last from 20 minutes to half an hour. In kids' shows, all the parts are pretty small and basic."

After spending five years directing high school actors, she worked her way up to adults.

"It was actually an easy transition, because I was also working on adult shows as an assistant or a choreographer," said Hauser, who's been with the Moraga Play-

house for 20 years. "My first adult show had both kids and adults in it."

Hauser has since founded her own production company — ABC Productions.

"We do shows for children and I teach drama classes in Orinda, Moraga and Danville," Hauser said.

Both Hauser and Means agree — the Contra Costa/Benicia collaboration has proven successful. Means' OnStage Theatre has Benicia's flocking to productions like 1998's "Grace and Glory," and the soon-to-open "Greetings."

"We have quite a few season ticket holders from Benicia," Means said.

Driving Miss Daisy continues on Friday and Saturday evenings, from Nov. 5 through Nov. 21 at 8 p.m., and on Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m. Doors open an hour before curtain. Tickets are \$14 for adults, \$12 for students and seniors and \$8 for children. Call 746-1269 for reservations or group discounts.



Fred Luckett portrays Hoke the chauffeur and Helen Means portrays Miss Daisy.

Bumpy road smooths out for 'Driving Miss Daisy'

By Judith Faught
Herald Staff Writer

BENICIA — Almost exactly a week before the opening of the scheduled five-week run of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "Driving Miss Daisy," the unthinkable happened.

The actor playing Hoke the chauffeur quit.

Rachel Hauser has stepped into roles at the last minute when an actor or actress had to leave because of an extreme emergency. But it's never happened to her as a director.

And this time she couldn't very well take on the character of an older, black man.

She briefly considered scrapping the whole show. It had been difficult enough to find an actor for that role to begin with, Hauser said.

The actress who plays Miss Daisy Werthan, Helen Means, is the artistic director of OnStage Theatre Company of Pleasant Hill. She knew of a local actor who had played Hoke in a few other productions of the show.

"I called him up and begged and pleaded with him," Hauser said.

Fred Luckett, an Oakland actor, not only agreed to do the show — but told Hauser that she didn't have to delay the show. He'd be up to snuff by the end of the week.



Hauser, however, decided to postpone the opening by a week — as the play will open Oct. 22.

Hauser won't comment about what led to the original actor's departure, other than to say it was the actor's decision, not hers. But she thinks Luckett joining the cast has made it better — even though they've had less time to rehearse.

"In a lot of ways, I think he has improved the show. His chemistry with Daisy is better," Hauser said. "He was ready to go right away. I really respect his professionalism."

The play closely follows the 1990 movie that won the Oscar as the best picture as well as the best-actress award for Jessica Tandy.

Daisy Werthan is an elderly Jewish widow who lives in the South during the 1950s. Her son, Bookie, hires Hoke as a chauffeur because the insurance company cancels its policy

on the accident-prone woman.

Daisy initially resents Hoke, who is a symbol of her loss of independence. But Hoke finally wins her over and through the next 20 years, the pair develops a relationship, not of romance, but of genuine respect.

"I really like the story and the feel of it," Hauser said of the play. "This show touches everybody."

Hauser decided to keep the props and sets simple, focusing on the richness of the story.

Hauser spent much of her theater life, which began around age 6, at the Moraga Playhouse. She directed her first show at the tender age of 14. "I've been given amazing opportunities," she said.

Now at age 26, she has already directed 30 to 40 plays. A year ago, she retired from acting.

Then, different roles started coming her way and before the

year was completed she had been in four productions — two with OnStage Theatre and two with the Galathea Players Ensemble Theatre in Pleasant Hill.

This is Hauser's first experience with theater in Solano County.

"I like Benicia," she said. "I wanted to branch out because you learn so much when you go to places. And I've learned a lot this time around."

Also cast in the show is Andy Shapiro of Vallejo as Bookie, Daisy's son.

People who have purchased tickets for the Oct. 15-17 shows are asked to return their tickets immediately for a refund or different show date. Because of the delayed opening, the show will only run four weekends. Instead of five, so only ticket purchases are advised.

ROSSMOOR NEWS NOVEMBER 10, 1999 13



REVIEW

By Charles Jarrett

"Driving Miss Daisy" in Benicia

One of the best bets in the dramatic department is the Benicia Old Town Theatre's current production of Alfred Uhry's famous play, "Driving Miss Daisy."

The Old Town Theatre in Benicia has often had some very entertaining, albeit amateurish, productions in the past, but occasionally, it puts on their very serious hats and come up with a real gem. This production is an absolute diamond.

"Driving Miss Daisy" is the heartwarming story of a very unique personal friendship between an elderly Jewish matron and her black chauffeur, as it takes place over a span of about 25 years in the Deep South. As the story begins, Daisy is a sharp-tongued, 72-year-old, highly independent woman of means. After she has been involved in several serious automobile mishaps while driving her own car causing her automobile insurance to be cancelled, her son adamantly insists that he employ a chauffeur to drive her around.

She strenuously resists the appearance of ostentation, refusing to be viewed publicly as a woman of means, with a chauffeur being the symbol of that wealth.

She demands her independence, even if it means taking the trolley to and from the grocery store. Much to her consternation, her son hires a chauffeur anyway. A great battle ensues as she has a great distrust of hired help, especially "those people of color." Her chauffeur, Hoke, gradually wins her over, and during the 25-year span of the play, the two develop a deep-rooted affection.

"Driving Miss Daisy" is a sensitive depiction of the sensibilities surrounding racial tensions during this time. It also addresses the problems and emotions involved with

Continued on page 40

Theatre Review

Continued from page 13

aging. The author has created two strong-willed independent individuals who come to a mutual respect based on their strengths and integrity. It is a play of rich and lasting beauty that will endure. The play is replete with colloquial witticisms and characterizations that describe the situation at hand.

Director Rachel Hauser has garnered a superb cast with Helen Means in the role of Daisy, Fred Luckett as her ever-patient chauffeur Hoke and Andy Shapiro as her son Bookie. Many of you may know Means for her superb portrayals at the OnStage Theatre in Pleasant Hill, where she is also the artistic director. Luckett is a new face to Walnut Creek audiences, but a face I hope to see often. He is as fully professional of an actor as you will find in any Bay Area production. He and Means are a superb combination.

In addition to the overall excellence of the production itself, the theatre hires an outside caterer to provide a theme dinner on Saturday nights.

Call (707) 746-1269 for tickets. This show runs Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., with Sunday performances at 4 p.m. through Nov. 21. The theatre is located in the B.D.E.S. Hall at 140 West "J" Street, Benicia.



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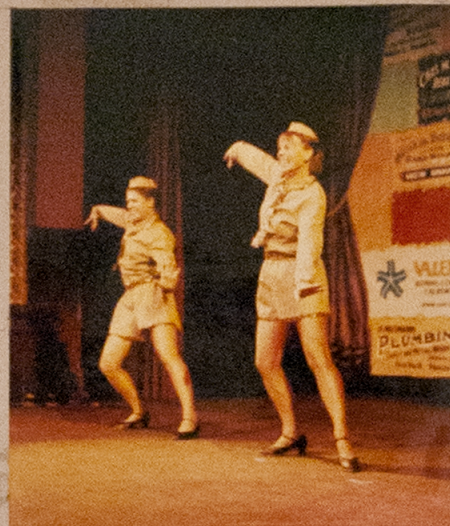
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Follies provides an entertaining history lesson

10-24-2000
By RACHEL RASKIN-ZIMEN
Times Herald staff writer

BENICIA — "The Benicia Follies," presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and running through Nov. 12, is an irreverent look at the city's past and present. It's a combination love letter/history lesson about a town which, apparently, has a lot about it to love.

Cast members dance, they sing, they change the words to familiar songs, and by so doing, pass along information about the characters instrumental to Benicia's formation, or who have passed through town since its founding. The information is presented in an often amusing and interesting way in this unique production.

Famous and infamous personages and incidents both past and present, are visited through the clever use of Allen Sherman-style musical parodies and vignettes.

It's a combination love letter/history lesson about a town which, apparently, has a lot about it to love.

Writer Jack London and future president U.S. Grant, for example, find their thrill "where life is sweet, at the foot of First Street."

Knowing that the cast is intentionally local and with varying degrees of performing experience, makes it easier to overlook the few flubs apparent on opening night.

It also makes how really well done most of the Follies is, that much more impressive.

There are some fine songs, musical and dancing talents involved in the Follies, and a few of the numbers are really a treat. "The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B" number, and the "Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Housies," are especially cute.

Benicians in particular are sure to appreciate the send-ups of some of the more recent Benicia institutions, such as the too often dark Majestic Theater, Touristcot and the fact that "dogs aren't allowed here, anymore."

Adele Maggrave, the writer and director of The Benicia Follies, obviously did a great deal of research into the colorful history of her adopted home town, and her theater and related experience translates into a very clever piece of family friendly local community theater.

"The Benicia Follies" is a fun little vaudeville, and every town should have one.

For tickets and information, call 746-1269.



AUSTIN SCOTT III is Little Ricky in the Benicia Old Town Theatre's production of "Benicia Follies."



Out on the Town

Benicia Follies: Several hours of local flavor served with style

By Brandi Schlossberg
STAFF WRITER

In a two-act play a little more than two hours long, writer and director Adele Margrave spills the beans about Benicia.

After a few drunken ballads, appearances by well-known, long-dead Benicians and dance numbers involving toxic waste, dental hygienists and hookers, audiences of "Benicia Follies," the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fall show, know both the proper and not-so-proper history of town.

Told mostly through music, the lyrical story of Benicia is both funny and well-written. In one of the first scenes, the fame-hungry lush Dona Benicia, played by Robin MacGregor, pleads with Mariano Vallejo,

REVIEW

played by Steve Dean, for piece of land in her honor, and the town is named.

Later, to the tune of a Willie Nelson song, the women of the Young Ladies School square off with Gertrude Gallardo, played by Louise Tegenkamp, and her prostitutes.

The audience hears that the "ladies of the evening" brought in about \$7 million a year and paid for the city pool.

"Lemos, he's a friend," sing the hookers. "Think of us when you swim."

Current issues are addressed in the second act. In a dreamy voice, Margrave laments traffic on the Benicia Bridge.

Male bonding at the Pastime,

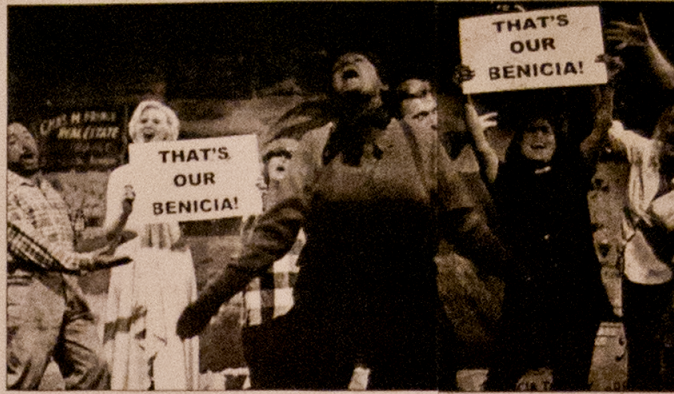
teen-age boredom and the mystery of the Majestic Theater, among other topics, are touched on as well.

Some highlights of "Benicia Follies" include Steve Waranietz as Robert Semple, the sounds of Joe Guistino's harmonica, Casey the clown and the voice of Teresa Carney.

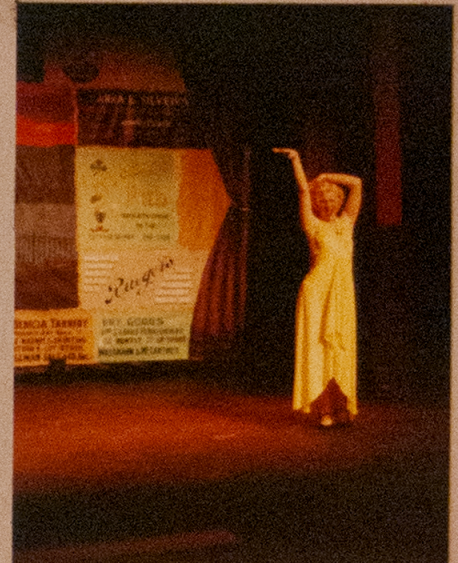
"Benicia Follies" is performed at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 W. J St., Friday and Saturday nights at 8 p.m. and Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m., through Nov. 12.

Tickets are available only at the door and cost \$12 for adults and \$10 for students and seniors.

For more information on "The Benicia Follies" or the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group call 746-1269.



They're having so much fun at the Benicia Follies the city manager should probably show up and put a stop to it.



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Benicia's 'Follies' a diamond in the rough

By Maya Sullivan
DAILY HERALD CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Jack London and Ulysses S. Grant are singing a drunken duet, "Life sure is sweetest," they warble, "At the foot of First Street." This number is one of many that make up the musical retelling (and in some cases revamping) of the town of Benicia's colorful history, from its early days as a part of a land grant to General Vallejo (the city was named after his wife) clear through to today.

Adele Margrave, who researched, wrote and directed the "The Benicia Follies," has put on a gem of a show. Margrave uses the mixture of polished, and not-so-polished, talent to advantage. She uses the show's satiric and irreverent nature to allow the few actors who are not the best singers or dancers to clown around a bit. None of the performers come up short on showmanship.

Mixing historical fact with musical whimsy, the "Follies" talk about the famous and infamous characters who have wandered through town during Benicia's history. While the encounter between Grant and London mentioned at the beginning of this review is fictitious (so far as we know), both men were in Benicia for a while.

Grant, at the time a Lieutenant in the



Jacqueline Gauthier plays Miss Emily Walsh in "The Benicia Follies." Seven-year-old Austin Shoot, right, plays a pony express rider. The "Follies" is the work of Adele Margrave and is the latest musical offering from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

THEATRE REVIEW
'The Benicia Follies'
BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
VENUE: B.D.E.S. HALL
REVUE: 8 P.M. FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, 4 P.M. SUNDAY
THROUGH NOV. 12 AT B.D.E.S. HALL, 140 WEST J ST., BENICIA
\$10-\$12, 746-1269
★★★
(out of four)



COURTESY PHOTOS

Army, was stationed at the arsenal in Benicia, and London was passing through on his way to greater adventures. At the time, neither man was famous. As our narrator says, "Benicia seemed to have that effect on people. It made them want to do bigger

and better things . . . after they left town." The songs are a lot of fun. Margrave has successfully taken popular songs of the past and present and rewritten them with a comic "Benicia-best."

Highlights included "The Ladies Duet," a confrontation between the young ladies of Benicia's school for girls, The Young Ladies Seminary and the (ahem) "ladies" of Gertrude's Place on a public thoroughfare. The song, a parody of the country western

classic, "Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys," brought down the house. And the performance of the number is a real crowd-pleaser.

Also worthy of mention is "I Am A Tall Man," adapted from the Jerry Herman standard, "I Am What I Am," and "Benicia Is A Girl's Best Friend," which is of course, based on that song made famous by Marilyn Monroe, "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend."

All of the performers play multiple roles; there are many that merit special mention. The performances of Steve Waranietz, Robin MacGregor, Joe Guistino, Jacqueline Gauthier and Alma Fader, in particular, go a long way to making this a most memorable evening. The costumes provided by Dyanne Vojvoda are very good as well.

Bottom line? "Benicia Follies" is a joyful romp through local history and a great example of true community theater. If you live in Benicia, this show is not to be missed and even if you don't it is well worth the trek. The "Follies" make a great night out. My vote: 3 stars.

Maya Sullivan is a local writer and theater correspondent. Feel free to e-mail her at tsudram@bellonline.com or visit her site at BejaOnline.com or www.bellonline.com/entertainment/beja/drama.





BENICIA'S FOLLIES — EXPOSED



LEFT: ROBIN MACGREGOR, left, and Bhakti Cross rehearse a dance number from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of 'The Benicia Follies.' Below: Austin Scott, left, and Steve Warametz rehearse a scene from 'The Benicia Follies.'

Theatre group acts out the colorful history of the town's people

By RACHEL RASKIN-ZRIHEN
Times-Herald staff writer
(C-15-2-00)

BENICIA — Valentine's Day is coming early to Benicia this year. The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production — an original work called "The Benicia Follies," described by its author as a Valentine to Benicia, opens Oct. 20 at the B.D.E.S. Hall.

Further described as "a somewhat irreverent look at the history and current events of life in Benicia," the Follies follows the town's history from its founding by Robert Semple (portrayed by BOTTG President Steve Warametz), through

some of the more colorful characters and events which have shaped the city.

"The first act covers the history up to the end of the 19th century, when there was a lot of action happening here," said Follies writer and director Adele Margrave, who also performs in the show.

"The second act is about the 20th century, dealing more with contemporary issues," she said.

"It's a musical revue — a vaudeville-style revue, you might say, about the town of Benicia," she added. "It's very tongue-in-cheek, and mixes historical fact

(See FOLLIES, C2)



Follies

(From C1)

with a bit of theatrical fantasy." Margrave, originally from Detroit and then San Francisco, whose research into the history of Benicia formed the basis for the show, learned a lot of interesting facts about her adopted home town.

"I spoke with a lot of long-time Benicia residents to research the show, so a lot of actual historical figures make appearances," she said.

Margrave, a Benicia resident since 1995, has been creating similar musical entertainment for corporate events and private parties for 20 years, researching and writing musical reviews built around a particular event.

A performer — actress, singer and songwriter — Margrave found this an acceptable outlet for her creativity in lieu of breaking into the showbiz big time. She finds the projects both interesting and fun.

"Benicia has quite an interesting history," Margrave said. "A lot of interesting characters, and even some famous people have come through Benicia." The Follies has no plot, per se, but instead illustrates the story of

Benicia through a series of vignettes, song parodies and skits.

"I consider this to be real community theater," Margrave said. "It's about our community, and every member of the cast is from either Benicia or Vallejo. They're all ages, types and levels of experience. Some theatrical snobs are giving me a hard time about that — but I'm holding my ground. That's what I think community theater is all about. I wanted to have community people participate in community theater."

There are 20 cast members, ranging in age from seven to sixty-something.

"I think people that know Benicia will get a kick out of it — but I think even if you don't, there's enough humor in it that you'll learn something and get a kick out of how it's presented," Margrave said.

— Follies writer and direc-

— The Benicia Follies opens Oct. 20 at the historic B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West "J" Street, and runs Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 12. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Matinees are Sundays at 4 p.m. Tickets are available at the door with prices ranging from \$12 for adults to \$10 for students and seniors.





Benicia Follies:

■ Paean to Benicia's storied past is premiere of community theater group's 37th season
SOLANO TIMES
 By Cecile Kazem
 Staff writer 10-26-2000

"The Benicia Follies" kicked off the 37th season of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group on Friday, Oct. 20. A rollicking good time, this is no doubt, the kind of show that ripens with age, considering that some pithy ad libs were already added by only the second performance.

From Marilyn to Elvia, from Sinatra to Gershwin—with some schtick, Gilbert and Sullivan, classic rock 'n' roll, and Motown thrown into the mix—the follies is a cross between burlesque, vaudeville and fractured soap opera, in the words of BOTTO president and principal player Steve Waranick, who stars as Dr. Robert Sample. However, more than anything, the show is a celebration of Benicia.

The play is a delightful romp into Benicia's colorful past and an irreverent look at the present, even addressing a few of the current "issues," such as Benicia's reputation as a dog-friendly town, the ordinance in Tourtelot, and the teens' perennial lament—"There's nothing to do." As if that didn't provide enough fodder, the show dares to jump into the "Ben-ee-ahs" vs. "Ben-i-ahs" fray. The times are familiar, and it's tempting to sing along, but that's best left for another time or the

audience will risk missing some of author Adele Margrave's clever lyrics. The production comes at a time when many residents may have wondered if the BOTTO was going to continue performing, at all. The group canceled its show last spring, and it looked doubtful that it would do a fall show, either. Margrave, who joined the company a year earlier, thought perhaps she had an answer.

Follies, see page 5



Follies

From page 1

"I could write something based on Benicia history. That way, there were no royalties to deal with," she said.

However, the board really didn't know Margrave or what she was capable of doing. Undaunted by some initial resistance, she wrote a couple of parodies and auditioned for the board—and the rest, as they say, is history.

It's not too surprising, however, because theater has long been a part of Margrave's life. She graduated from Northwestern University in Illinois with a bachelor's degree

Follow the footlights

What: "The Benicia Follies," Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fall production
 When: Through Nov. 12—8 p.m.
 Fridays and Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays
 Where: 80 E.S. Hall, 140 West 1 St., Benicia
 Cost: Adults—\$12; students, ages 11-18, and seniors, ages 62 and older—\$10
 Information: Call 747-1945

in speech/theater, with an emphasis in acting, and appeared in numerous university theater productions.

She later worked as an actress in New York in several off-off Broadway productions. And while she was in New York, Margrave wrote and performed an original musical review for children, "Sparrows

Don't Drop Candywrappers," which toured the public schools in New York and New Jersey.

After moving to San Francisco, where she lived for more than 20 years, Margrave began writing mini-musical comedies for parties, which eventually blossomed to a solo business providing original musical entertainment for corporate events and parties under the business name, "Make It a Musical."

But the move to Benicia for the self-described "city gal" came at a time when Margrave was ready for a change.

"Benicia is a wonderful place," she says. "It's so wholesome, and it was a place where I could afford a house and have

my three dogs."

It seemed even more propitious since she also loved history, and it wasn't long before she was dabbling into Benicia's rich past.

Although she has been involved in solo performances, she's working this time with a huge cast of characters—and more than 20 actors.

The first act mixes historical fact with a bit of musical fantasy, and real characters from Benicia's rich past meet, mingle and sing about their city.

Jack London, Ulysses S. Grant, Gen. Mariano Vallejo and his wife Dona Benicia (for whom the town is named), Matthew Turner, and that "very tall guy"—Dr. Robert Sample—are among the notable.

But Benicia always has been filled with colorful characters, especially women.

One particularly amusing bit pits the "self-sacrificing missionary types" who inhabited Gertrude's "socially acceptable establishment"—otherwise known as a house of ill repute—against Mary Lynch and her young ladies from the Young Ladies Seminary, a most prestigious educational establishment of the day.

The second act catapults the audience into the 20th century and delights in the issues of the day, including Prohibition, where unhappy blokes contemplate the question, "Where Is There a Speakeasy?" to the tune of "Wouldn't It Be Lovely."

And the audience is even treated to a more contemporary issue—in a wildly satirical piece, cast members emerge enshrouded in hazardous waste uniforms to sing of Tourtelot to the tune of "Let It Snow."

And as they shift in time and character, rapport among actors is evident, especially as they create multiple personalities throughout the evening.

"The majority of the cast is relatively new," Waranick says, "but they've really become troupers in the past few weeks."

No doubt, since Margrave says the work is literally hot off the press—she was still writing portions of the play up until three weeks ago.

"Adele, the show is three

weeks away, and we really do need to see the second act," she says, laughingly describing what she suspects were her colleagues' thoughts at the time.

"They were a bit impatient with me, but this has really come together in the end."

Margrave believes that Benicians can relish their past and be willing to laugh just a bit at how they got where they are today.

After all, it was Gertrude's girls who paid for the city pool—or more precisely, half of the pool.

"When California's attorney general declared that all houses of ill repute had to be shut down permanently, the pool—indeed paid for in a parting gesture by the girls—was only half completed," says Lee

Syracuse, one of the historical consultants that Margrave used in her research. "And the city had to come up with the rest."

The beauty is that this is community theater about our community," Margrave says.

"And I'm sure that we have more than enough people here to fill the theater without heading toward the East Bay, not that those folks won't enjoy the humor. And they'll learn some history, too."

However, viewers beware—for all the polish of ACT, they should head out to the big city.

But for a genuine toe-tap-pin' good time, with more than a few belly laughs, "The Benicia Follies" really hits the mark.



Robin MacGregor as Dona Benicia and Steve Dean as Mariana Vallejo in one of the numbers of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Benicia Follies."



OUT OF MY MIND

By Cecile Kazem
cckazem@solonews.net

Collaboration lifts work to new level

If there was a theme for my visits around town this past week, it surely had to be "collaboration," and nowhere was that more evident than by talking with folks from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTTG) and from Arts Benicia.

While these two entities have worked together for a number of years on the Toast to the Arts fund-raiser, their collaboration reached a new level in the past few months as representatives from Arts Benicia, as well as local high school artists, worked together to paint a replica of the theater group's historic olio.

Nearly ago, the olio—the fire screen backdrop that was used in the theater for more than 75 years—also served as an advertisement for local businesses. "During the late 1800s and early 1900s, when newspapers were fledglings, theaters would sell spots on the olio. That was the very best advertising those folks could get," says BOTTG president Steve Waranietz.

The group's olio, which was fitted to hang in R.D.E.S. Hall where BOTTG performs, is literally a huge, wonderful historical document in its own right, originally created by M. E. Venegas of Martinez and containing hosts of names that are familiar about town even now, although those earlier businesses are long gone. Seeing the gargantuan canvas across, artist Michael Brown was amazed at the artistry that master sign painter Venegas was able to put into his work. "I can only imagine what he was thinking and how he felt while doing this all those years ago," Brown says.

So while it would have been the perfect backdrop for the upcoming show, "The Benicia Follies," a raucous musical romp through Benicia's colorful past written by local author Adele Margrave, the original olio is extremely fragile. Hence, the need to design a replica, and there's where the Arts Benicia folks stepped in.

For about four months, Arts Benicia members Michael Brown, Gene Hirsch, Joel Fallon and John Reis—joined by high school artists Russell Brown and Ryan Wilson—have faithfully recreated the style and spirit of the original work. And while replicating some of the work exactly, they've added some new names—bringing the past together with the present. Literally hundreds of hours were spent on the project during the past few months, but Michael Brown says that this was truly a labor of love (with only a mock hint of the need for payback).

But on a serious note, the two groups have now formed a lasting alliance—something far greater than their original working relationship—that will be in good stead for the entire arts community. The new relationship is something that Waranietz feels about deeply. "These guys have gone well beyond the call of duty," he says, "and in the process, we've forged some deep friendships, as well."

This was by no means an easy task. Recreating the olio was a huge undertaking, and although filled with some fine detail, was done in a theatrical style, designed to create illusion—something with which the artists were less familiar. But this involved the love of art, and the willingness to dedicate the time and effort to extend beyond the norm, so to speak. "We do theater for the fun and the love of it, and I can see that these guys feel the same love of their art as we do," Waranietz declares.

The new olio is simply an outstanding testament to collaboration. With this in mind, the need to develop performing arts alliances seems all the more significant. BOTTG has recently joined with Vallejo Music Theater and the Vallejo Concert Association, establishing the Performing Arts Alliance and is now offering season tickets to six shows, including "The Benicia Follies" that opens this weekend.

And while that's a step in the right direction, both Waranietz and Brown can see value in a more inclusive alliance, encompassing the entire arts. "My philosophy is that there is definitely strength in numbers. What we cannot do alone, we definitely can do in conjunction with others," Waranietz believes.

We test ourselves as an arts community. Perhaps now is a good time to define what that really means. For sure, it means patronage. And it absolutely means becoming a part of things—more than just as an observer, and it means looking at ways we can develop that strength in numbers of which Waranietz spoke. We do have incredible resources here, both within the schools and the community at large. Pooling those resources is simply the best thing that we can do as an arts community. It's smart, savvy, and if the collaboration between Arts Benicia and BOTTG is any indication, it works.

For the record, all the proceeds from the ticket sales for the performance of BOTTG's "Benicia Follies" on Sunday, Oct. 22, will be donated to the Benicia High School Panther Band. That's just one more link in the chain. I invite everyone to come out and see the show that runs through Nov. 12. The tunes are familiar, but the lyrics are, well... listen closely—you might be surprised to learn who paid for the community swimming pool.

The offerings by the Performing Arts Alliance includes "The Benicia Follies," "October Fest," "Sing Along Mamma!" "Something's Afoot," and two additional Vallejo Concert Association performances. Season tickets are \$80 per person. For information call 552-ARTS (552-2787).

THE BENICIA FOLLIES



PERFORMING ARTS ALLIANCE!

BOTTG has joined forces with the Vallejo Music Theatre and the Vallejo Community Concert Association to form the Performing Arts Alliance.

We urge you to take advantage of the Subscription Offer, which provides tickets to Six (6) shows presented by these three groups

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Vallejo Community Concert Association
Vallejo Music Theatre

"ONE TICKET DOES IT ALL!"

See Representatives here in the Theatre
or call 707-746-1269

TWO THINGS...

We congratulate and wish the BENICIA HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND all the best as they travel to the ROSE BOWL PARADE in Pasadena, California. A portion of our proceeds from our October 30th Performance of THE BENICIA FOLLIES will be donated to the BHS Marching Band Boosters!!

Also, before you leave, stop by the BENICIA HERALD Table and guess the total number of Candy Corns in ALL the displays. Turn in your entry by October 30th to qualify for the prize money:

1st Place: \$100 2nd Place: \$50 3rd Place: \$25

Good Luck! And have a safe HALLOWEEN NIGHT!!!!

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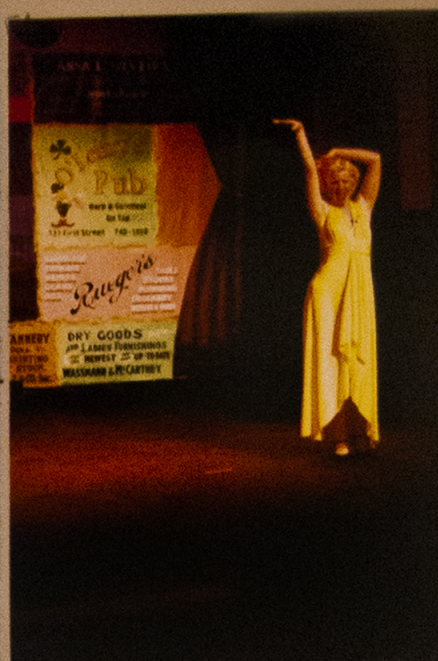
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'Benicia Follies' sequel opens

Times-Herald staff reports

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opens its 38th season with "Benicia Follies Too," a sequel to the original "Benicia Follies" that premiered last year.

Running today through May 13, the production is based on actual characters and events from the city's history.

The tongue-in-cheek look at Benicia's history is based on research and an original script by Adele Margrave. It features both famous and infamous historical Benicians, beginning with the city's founder, Robert Semple and the town's namesake, Benicia Vallejo, wife of General Vallejo, and depicts Benicia through the more colorful aspects of life on early First Street.

Margrave warns that some liberties have been taken in the spirit of fun and music.

The production begins with the story of early Benicia, while Act II covers the more recent history of the city, with "even more liberties being taken in the spirit of comedy."

Gina Guistino, a stage veteran who plays a hussy in "Benicia Follies Too" describes the production as being "like the Beach Blanket Bingo of Benicia."

Performances are scheduled for 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West "J" Street, Benicia. Sunday performances are at 4 p.m.

Ticket prices are \$12 for adults and \$10 for students ages 13-16 and seniors 62 and over.

For more information, call 746-1269.



FROM LEFT: Bhakti Cross, Gina Guistino and Cathy Garrett as the Hussies in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "The Benicia Follies Too."

Times-Herald/L.L. Brown



Mike McCoy/DAILY REPUBLIC

Teresa Hewitt, center, plays Emma Wixom, an opera star who returns to Benicia after becoming famous.

Benicia parody is a big hit

Entertaining 'Follies' pokes fun at town's past

By Michael T. Moseley
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — Since 1964, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has proudly performed such classics as "Our Town," "Harvey," "Anything Goes," "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Once Upon a Mattress," "Chapter Two" and even won an Arty for outstanding comedy in 1997 with their production of "Rumors."

But, for the second year in a row, they have stepped out on faith to perform an original musical. Riding the success of last year's "Benicia Follies," the group once again called on parody lyricist Adele Margrave to produce "Benicia Follies Too."

Though a little slow out of the starting gate, "Follies Too" comes in as a delightful winner in the hearts of Benicians young and old. Presenting the history of Benicia in a humorous and entertaining way is not an easy task, but the cast and crew easily pull the audience into the act, poking fun at past politicians, lawyers, artists and madams. If the musical is any indication of the town itself, it's a charming place to live.

Margrave brings a who's-who list of Benicia's past residents into play with one another. A drunken Lt. Ulysses S. Grant (Joe Guistino) shares a drink with Jack London (Don McAdama), then sings the praises of Benicia's most notable madam, Gertie Gallardo (Joanne Maxwell). Though the three walked Benicia's First Street at completely different times in history, Margrave's use of this strange time continuum was hardly an issue.

Lovers of Benicia trivia will no doubt learn many interesting facts about the

port city. Concepcion Arguello (Alma Pader), the first California-born nun, for example, was the daughter of the commandant of the Presidio. To the strains of "Some Enchanted Evening," we learn that she fell in love with Nikolai Petrovich (Geno Figueroa), a Russian emissary, who returned to Russia without her.

She waited for 32 years before learning that he had died in Russia. What else could she do but join a convent and start a school for ladies in Benicia?

Another bit of trivia has to do with the local swimming pool, which was originally financed by Gallardo and her "ladies of the evening." In a light-hearted jab at the current city government, who seems to be having trouble raising the funds to refurbish the pool, Gallardo asks if she should bring the ladies back to help.

We learn about one of Benicia's oddest couples — the be-horned opera diva Emma Wixom (Teresa Hewitt) and the United States Heavyweight champion prizefighter known as "The Benicia Boy" (Don McAdama).

Seems they had a whirlwind romance while "The Boy" was fighting on barges in the harbor. It didn't last long, but certainly makes for an entertaining scene as Wixom sings, "The Boy from Our Benicia."

Furthermore, we learn that Lansing Mizner Sr. (Margrave) had six boys, one girl and the first indoor toilet in Benicia; Mayor William Crooks (Figueroa) started the first movie theater; and that Crooks' protégé, James Lemos (Guistino), became the most corrupt mayor the city has ever known.

From the past to the present, Margrave lets her love for Benicia show through. In songs like "No City Like My City" (sung to the tune of "No Business Like Show Business"), "First Street" (sung to the tune of "Downtown"), "Union Hotel" (sung to the tune of "Heartbreak Hotel"), "Kid Friendly Place" (sung to the tune of "Put On a Happy Face"), "Benicia Is a Girl's Best

Friend" (sung to the tune of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend"), "That's Our Benicia" (sung to the tune of "That's Entertainment") and her personal aria "Dog Lover's Blues," Margrave demonstrates her ability to satirize a variety of song styles — even singing the audience into the intermission.

The theatergoer will no doubt appreciate the talents of some of the more notable performers in the musical. Guistino was born for comedy theater. As Mayor Lemos, Guistino, with facial expressions alone, will leave a smile on your face. Dan Martinez, who plays Lemos' pink-suited partner Romeo Lavesso, is also a master of comedic gestures. Figueroa proves to be the male vocal standout, crooning "Union Hotel," "Oh, Yes, I'm the Great Projector" and "Real Estate Agent Man" with all of the feel of a 1950s balladeer.

Besides Margrave, three other female performers are also worth mentioning. Hewitt demonstrates a wonderful singing voice in "The Boy from Our Benicia" and the "Teen Lament." Jacqueline Gauthier not only dances her way into the hearts of the audience, but is also credited for choreographing the entire production. Suzanne Caruso also put in a strong performance, singing the lead for Crooks' Singers as well as the Funky Music in the Jazzercise number.

On the junior end of the scale, minors Jason Martinez and Darlene Parilla were delightful.

Martinez, as humorist Wilson Mizner, "I hate work like the Lord hates St. Louis."

All in all, the entire cast was a joy to watch. Not to be left out, Bhakti Cross, Gina Guistino and Cathy Garrett sang their hearts out as the "Hussies" and Jimmy's Girls.

"Follies Too" is more than a history lesson, it's a lesson in life. "If you can't laugh at yourself, who can you laugh at?"

Suisun City resident Michael T. Moseley is a freelance writer. He can be reached at michael.moseley@travis.af.mil.





The ladies from the School for Girls take off with the Hussies and Madam Gertrude Gallardo in "Benicia Follies Too!"

Benicia Follies: the sequel

Song, dance and comedy celebrate town's unique history

By Judith Faught

Once was not enough for "The Benicia Follies." The Benicia Old Towne Theatre Group is bringing back favorite parts of its fall musical and adding new material to create "The Benicia Follies Too!"

Adele Margrave, who penned and directed the first Follies, has returned as well. She researched the history of Benicia and comically set some of its tales in music and embellished others. Audiences ate it up, and it became one of the most popular shows ever for the theater group.



Seven or eight songs from the original show make an encore appearance, while Margrave has added 20 new ditties.

Local legends making their debut with the sequel include Boxing Hall of Fame member James "The Benicia Boy" Heenan; Concepcion Arguilla, a man who died of a broken heart; and James Lemos, a former Benicia city councilman, mayor and police commissioner (and the guy whom the city pool is named after), who many thought was better than sliced bread and others viewed as a shyster.

Characters returning from the original "Follies" include Ulysses S. Grant and Jack London, as well as Madam Gertrude Gallardo and her hussies.

After finishing the first show, many people came up to Margrave and made suggestions about people and events she should have included, so she wrote another musical with more events included.

"I love doing it," she said. "I could go on forever." She admits, however, that she is a bit nervous about her follow-up effort, as sequels rarely match the success of the original.

"I do feel a kind of pressure," Margrave said.

But she believes this show is a bit more sophisticated, a bit more polished than the first.

The cast of 16 ranges from elementary school children to senior citizens.

Back-to-back "Follies" don't please everybody.

Margrave acknowledges that some members of the Benicia theater community prefer the group perform more traditional shows, such as "Driving Miss Daisy" and "Annie Warbucks."

She calls the nay-sayers "theatrical snobs."

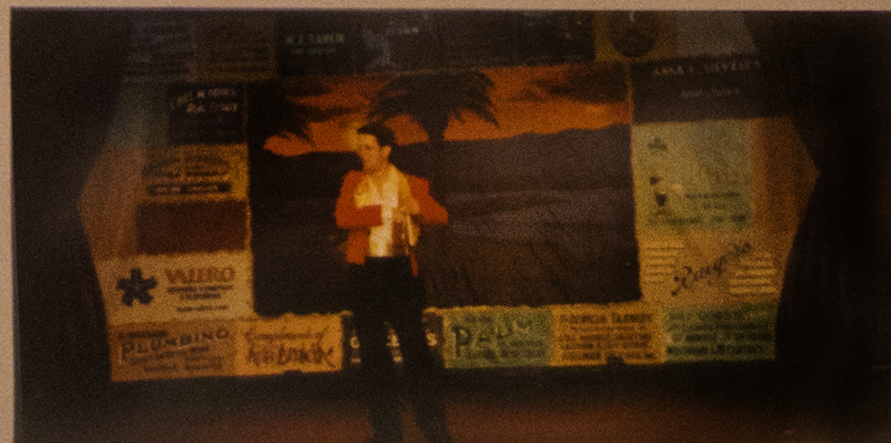
"This isn't Broadway, it's Benicia," Margrave said, adding that the goal of community theater should be to allow local actors to have fun as well as entertain the audience.

Though Benicia residents will revel in their history, those from outside Benicia will be entertained as well, Margrave pledged.

"Many of California's early cities were unusually colorful and Benicia has more than its fair share of bawdy, memorable characters and stories," she said.

Judith Faught can be reached at jfaught@dailyrepublic.net.

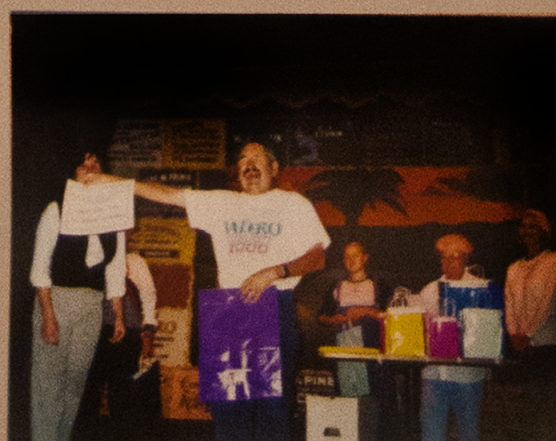
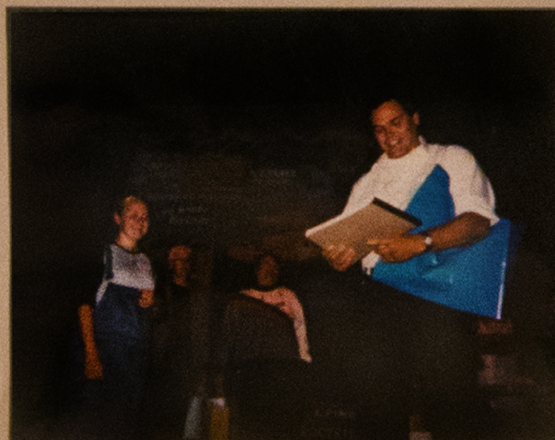
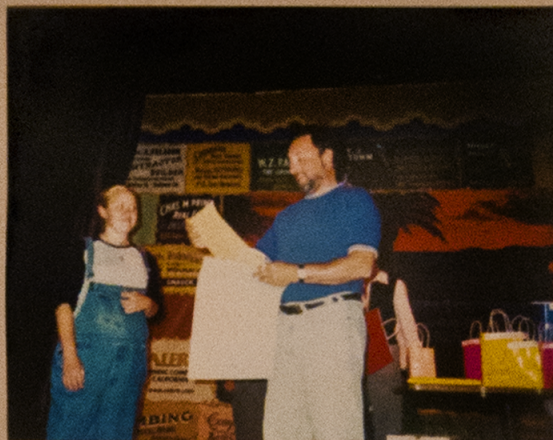
Ulysses S. Grant (Joe Gustafson) and Jack London (Don McAdams) have a drink together.







Patti Lund
Kevin McCall Award Recipient
Follies Too.





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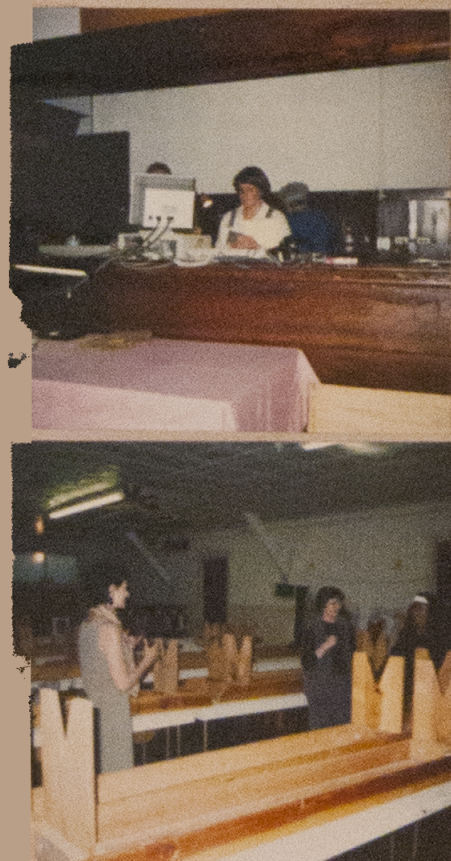
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'Benicia Follies' sequel a hit

By RICHARD FREEDMAN
Times-Herald staff writer

BENICIA — It's not yet as ongoing as "Friday the 13th," "Star Wars" or that all-time favorite, "Police Academy," but Adele Margrave just may have herself a cottage industry siphoning historic characters and follies out of historic Benicia.

First, there was "Benicia Follies," which enjoyed a 12-show run last year that attracted the best attendance in the last 10 years of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

And now the encore — "The Benicia Follies Too!" — that opens tonight and runs weekends through May 13 at the B.D.E.S. Hall downtown.

"During the first one, people were saying, 'Oh my God, you should do it again,'" said Margrave, the production's writer and director, admitting that "Benicia provides a large variety of fun material."

Several original cast members return to offer a glimpse of Benicia's history through song parodies and popular music.

Jacqueline Gauthier, a mere 17, comes back as choreographer for the sequel that's "a bit more sophisticated than the first," said Margrave.

"The music is familiar and the productions are pretty cute," Margrave added. "We've gone into a lot more choreography this time. I gave Jacqueline a lot more to do."

Margrave said she thought about the sequel back to when she was writing the original.

"I had to leave out a lot of material the first time," she said.

"I did learn a lot last time, like I can push the envelope a little further. The first time around, I thought, 'I hope I don't offend anybody,' since I poked fun at Benicia history. But people seemed to love it, even the people who are involved with historical preservation in Benicia."

Margrave took historical characters and events in Benicia and turned it into a musical comedy.

"I think it was a surprise to some people," Margrave said. "People really didn't expect it."

Because of the limited advertising budget, Margrave said the show eventually sold out by word-of-mouth.

"It was really flattering," she said. "It meant that people had been talking about it."

The historical aspects of the production are based on fact, Margrave said, though the details "did take the tooth and twist it a little bit, but they're all real people and they really lived in Benicia."

Some figures this time around include John "The Benicia Boy" Heenan, a professional boxer, and the Mizner family. Other characters include former Mayor William Crooks and James



JASON MARTINEZ, left, is the bartender and Joe Guistino plays Ulysses S. Grant in "Benicia Follies Too" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

Lemos.

Margrave based her play on history books. BOTTO members who have lived in Benicia more than 30 years, and former city planner Lee Syracuse who "gave me some fabulous stories," the director said.

Songs for "The Benicia Follies Too!" are mostly familiar tunes, Margrave said.

"We even put in an N'Sync number," she said. "We really span generations with our music."

With the success of the first Benicia Follies, Margrave has high expectations for the sequel.

"I'd be very disappointed" without packed houses, she said.

After so many rehearsals, Opening Night is a welcomed relief, added Margrave.

"I've reached the point in rehearsals where it isn't funny anymore because you've seen it so many times yourself," she said.

"So it's fun when someone walks in and sees it for the first time and laughs at things. You think, 'Maybe it is still funny.'"

As a BOTTO member less than two years, Margrave is one of the new additions to the company.

"Since I am one of the new people, it's been hard to introduce new ideas to a group that's been around 37 years," she said. "I do honor the history of the group. I do think we can meet Benicia's needs."

There was a stink coming out that didn't think "Benicia Follies Too!" should have been produced, Margrave said.

"They didn't want the BOTTO to be known as a group that does 'fluff,'" she said. "Fortunately, there were people who thought, 'Why argue with success?' There is a need for new blood and people who do have fresh ideas."

The BOTTO fall production is unknown, but it won't be Benicia Follies, Margrave said.

Will there be a Follies III somewhere down the line?

"That remains to be seen," Margrave said. "I think the cast would love to do it again. We've had a such a great time doing it."

Q "The Benicia Follies Too" opens today and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 4 p.m. and runs weekends through May 13 at the B.D.E.S. Hall, 140 West J St. Benicia. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$10 for seniors and children. For information, call 743-0089.



BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
 READERS THEATRE
 PRESENTS
**"MORGANA'S
 HEART"**
 Saturday, October 13, 2001

DIRECTOR: GEORGIA TAYLOR BENEDICT
 PRODUCER: BARBARA FUGATE

CAST
 MORGANA -- ADELE MARGRAVE
 GABRIEL -- DON McADAMS
 LINDY -- ALEXANDRA REIDER
 CHRISTAL -- GEORGIA TAYLOR BENEDICT
 HELEN -- GINA GUISTINO
 PHIL -- JOE GUISTINO



Two plays to choose from next month

By Heather Bremner
 STAFF WRITER

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will bring two new shows to town with a free performance of "Morgana's Heart" on Oct. 13 and then begin their season with Neil Simon's 1991 Pulitzer Prize winning play, "Lost in Yonkers," on Oct. 19.

"Morgana's Heart," an original play by Benicia playwright, Shirley King, won the 2001 Theatre on the Ridge playwright contest, a new play contest sponsored by the California Arts Council.

The play is directed by Georgia Taylor Benedict and centers around a story about a recipient of a transplanted heart. When Morgana receives a new heart, she finds herself confronted by the ghost of the young donor.

King's play was chosen over 25 other submissions from around the state and will take place at 2 p.m. at the BDES Hall.

Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers" delves into the makeup of human beings and examines each separate entity.

"For me this play is one that has many layers of emotion, humor and poignancy," said Carlene Collier Coory, director of OTTG's first offering of the 2001-2 season. "For any director, as well as actor, this is a marvelous project because

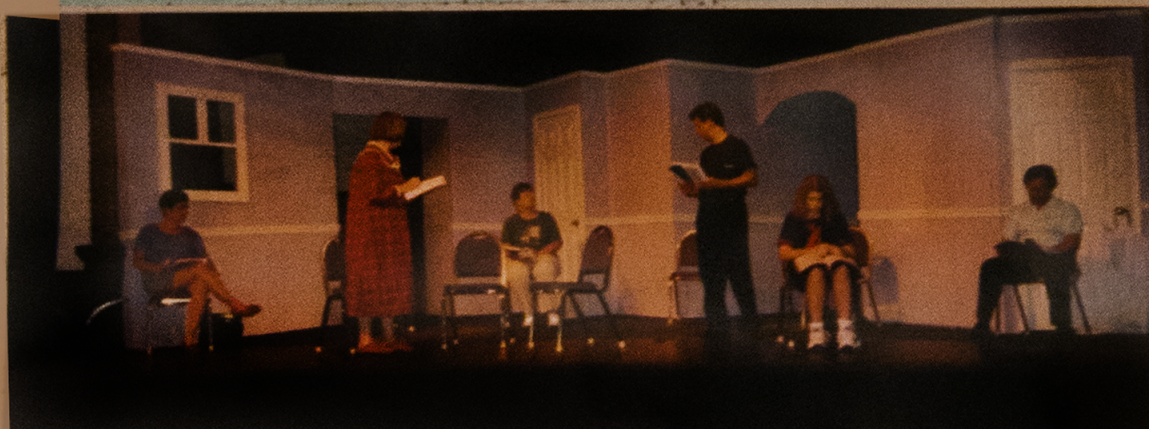
of the depth of humanness and the fragility that Simon instills in each of his characters."

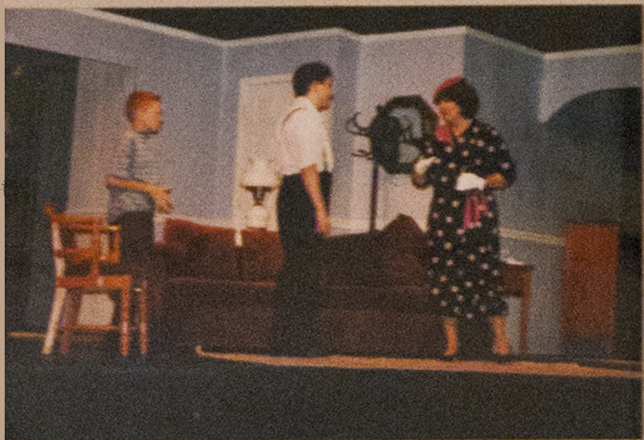
Coory has been active in the theatre since she was a child but over the past 10 years she stopped concentrating on acting and instead began to focus on directing. In 2000 she won the ARTY award for best direction of the musical "My Fair Lady."

Although she has never directed a Neil Simon play, she has been a fan of his for many years. When she first moved to Vallejo, she said, the very first play she saw was at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and it was a Neil Simon's "Runners".

"Lost in Yonkers" has an irresistible universality which touches on the aspects of just what it takes and means to be alive," said Coory. "This play pivots around one family's passions, desires and yearnings, as seen through the love, laughs, tears and life-lessons that we all share."

The upcoming production of "Lost in Yonkers" opens Oct. 19 and runs every weekend through Nov. 11. The premiere will include a gala and pre-show entertainment by Susie Harper Dancers. The shows are on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. at the BDES Hall, 140 West J. St. in Benicia. For more information call Bhakti Cross at 748-1773 or for group sales call 746-1269.





A8 Tuesday, October 23, 2001 — DAILY REPUBLIC

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

'Lost in Yonkers' is a treat to find

Cast especially good in Benicia production

By Michael T. Moseley
DAILY REPUBLIC CORRESPONDENT

BENICIA — When playwright Neil Simon was asked which of his plays was his favorite, he quickly replied, "Lost in Yonkers."

And why not? In 1991, it not only won him a Pulitzer, it propelled him into national recognition. Not that he hadn't already given the world some great writing, but until that time, he was still not taken seriously by his critics.

"Lost in Yonkers" opened last weekend in Benicia. "I believe there is something inherent in all of us which longs for a much simpler time," said Carlene Collier Coury, director of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production.

Though the play may portray a "simpler time," the situations the characters find themselves in is anything but simple. "Lost in Yonkers" tells the tale of a troubled father, who only wants the best for his two young sons. Having gone into serious debt after the death of his wife, Eddie Kurnitz finds it necessary to seek funds from the local loan shark (never a good idea).

With time against him, Eddie discovers that he has less than a year to come up with \$8,000. Luckily, the federal government is buying scrap iron to assist in the war effort. Eddie is forced to find a place for his sons while he travels, making money on the deal.

The sons, Arty and Jay, have a dilemma of their own — the only place for them to stay for the 10 months their dad will be gone is with their ailing and not-so-pleasant grandmother. If that weren't enough, they'll have to put up with the antics of their overly exuberant Aunt Bella, their wannabe-wiseguy Uncle Louie and their hyperemulating Aunt Gertrude.

The plot makes for a tricky situation, but it was overcoming another tricky situation that makes the Benicia production a true gem — it's the behind-the-scenes story of Fairfield's Jeremy Kremer, the actor who plays the oldest son, Jay.

"He came in on Saturday (six days



Claire Gardner plays the part of the hot-so-pleasant grandmother in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production.

before opening night) and learned everything so quickly," said Coury. The other members of the cast echoed her amazement as they expressed their concern about being able to open on time when the actor cast to play the part had to drop out of the production.

Kremer, however, is no stranger to theater. At 15, he's been at it for seven years already. His mother, former New Yorker Serena Kremer, helped him with his accent. Sally Palmer, local costume and family friend, helped him with his clothing, and dad and his two brothers were there for support.

With all that behind him, Kremer made his debut in Benicia a good one. Learning his lines was one thing, but Kremer also mastered the blocking and voice inflection. His perfect comic timing also makes him a standout.

Not to be outdone is 18-year-old Cole Harry, who plays little brother Arty.

"He's just like a little Ron Howard," said Claire Gardner, who plays the cantankerous grandmother.

Her words were more true than not. Not only does young Harry have the red hair and impish looks of an adolescent Howard, but the Benicia resident also played Winthrop in Napa Valley College's production of "The Music Man," a role Howard made famous in the film adaptation.

A backstage secret is that Gardner played the part of Mrs. Parno,

Winthrop's mother, in the Solano College Theatre production of "Music Man." What's more, in the same production in 1999, Kremer, with younger brother Josh, was a child extra in the SOT presentation. Small world, this place they call theater.

In "Lost in Yonkers," Kremer and Harry trade quips like a young Martin and Lewis on a Las Vegas stage. It's an old vaudeville adage — never follow animals or children — but Matthew Surreance wades in unafraid. Surreance, who hails from Richmond, plays the boys' streetwise uncle Louie — sort of a cross between Joe Pesci and Humphrey Bogart.

Surreance not only adds to the comedy interaction, first begun by Kremer and Harry, he brings a certain, well, we'll call it "mojo" to the scenes. Surreance nails the snide-but-lovable character with a flair for the dramatic.

Perhaps his 10-year stint as a theater critic lent him just the right amount of cynicism to master the role.

Another standout is the delightful Siobhan O'Brien, who portrays aunt Bella. O'Brien's character undergoes the most pronounced of transformations during the production and the Benicia resident handles it artfully.

This is the second time she's played the part and it is one of her favorite roles. The character allows her the opportunity to solicit virtually every emotion known to man. From

happiness to despair, from pity to exaltation, O'Brien taps at the audience's collective heart.

Gardner's portrayal of the not-so-loving grandmother is a difficult role. She's the one you love to hate, yet somehow, you understand her. Gardner does an excellent job of being the ultimate martinet, while at the same time letting just a little of the softer side of the character shine through.

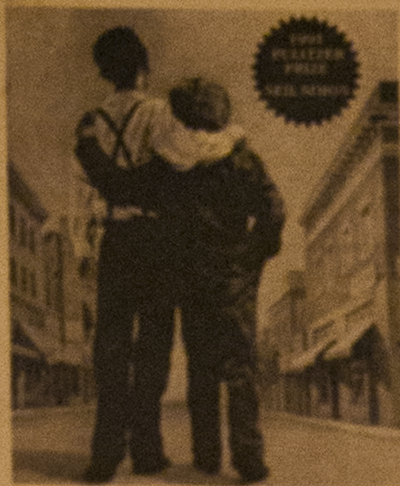
The soft-spoken father, Eddie, is played by Benicia's Roque Gutierrez, the anchor around which the play is moored. Gutierrez is a natural on stage and doesn't seem to be acting at all — that's what all thespians strive for.

Jessica Brittan, as aunt Gertrude, doesn't appear until the final scenes, but easily blends in with the rest of the cast. By the time she makes her entrance, the audience feels like they already know her. Brittan's performance required her to learn to say the first part of a sentence while exhaling and the last part while inhaling — not an easy task. Brittan does a wonderful job!

Together, the seven members of Benicia's "Lost in Yonkers" make the play an enjoyable production — one I'm sure even Mr. Simon would appreciate.

Suisun City resident Michael T. Moseley is a freelance writer. He can be reached at michael.moseley@times.com.





LOST IN YONKERS

By Neil Simon

Directed by
Carlene Collier Coury

PROGRAM CHANGES

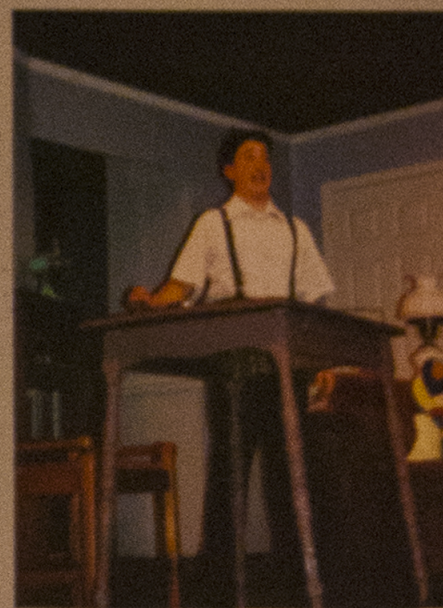
The role of Jay will be played by Jeremy Krammer

Bio

Thirteen-year-old Jeremy Krammer has been involved in theatre since he was eight. His recent credits include Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors* with Harbor-Solano Youth Conservatory, Jason in *Falsettos* with Golden Players and The San Francisco Young Peoples Theatre. He won an Elly award last month for his role in *Under the Influence* for Harbor Youth Productions. Last year he won an Elly for his portrayal of Judah in *The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* for Solano College. The year before Jeremy won an Elly for *Runaway Stage Productions* for *Nobody Loves a Dragon*. He is currently rehearsing for *Oliver* in *Vacaville* and *Comedy of Errors* in *Sausalito*. Jeremy is happy to be involved for the first time with The Solano Old Town Theatre Group. He would like to thank his director Carlene for this opportunity and having faith in him. Jeremy would like to thank his vocal directors Connie Lisee and Joe Barnett for making him always sound good. He would like to thank Sally Palmer for making him look good. He would like to thank Pam Sperring, Chad Fick, Heather Raney, and Matt Duvall, and his Harbor friends for giving him so much support. Finally he would like to thank his parents for their love and guidance and his two brothers, Adam and Joshua, for putting up with his constant singing and dancing.

Technical Crew

Lighting Technician: Sean Frierson
Backstage Crew: Amanda Walker, Heather Nito, Scott Cogley



'Yonkers' a rewarding find

By RACHAL RASHKIN-ZHURIN
Times Herald staff writer

Yonkers, N.Y. (The Herald) — The recently produced play, "Lost in Yonkers," by Neil Simon, is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

The character of Bella, Eddie's apparently elderly mother, is perfectly played by Judith Keston. Keston is a veteran actor, and her performance is a real gem. The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

'Lost in Yonkers,' the quintessential Neil Simon piece, tells the story of a delightfully dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

Matthew Sommer, a longtime actor, director and playwright originally from Los Angeles, plays the boys' gangster uncle Louis in comic perfection. "Lost in Yonkers" deals with a family that is dysfunctional and dysfunctional. The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

The character of Bella, Eddie's apparently elderly mother, is perfectly played by Judith Keston. Keston is a veteran actor, and her performance is a real gem. The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.



CLAIRE GARDNER as Grandma, Cole Henry as Alvin, Jonathan Britton as Carl and Jeremy Krammer as Jay, in the Solano Old Town Theatre Group's production of Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers."



Coury: 'Yonkers' is microcosm of society

By RICHARD FREEDMAN
Times Herald staff writer

Carlene Coury says it is her Magnificent Seven. It's the actors and actresses who are the stars of the play "Lost in Yonkers," by Neil Simon. The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

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What's interesting about this is that it's a microcosm of society at the time. The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

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The play is a comedy, and it is a rewarding find. The play, which is a comedy, tells the story of a dysfunctional New York Jewish family at the outbreak of World War II.

Simon play a real winner

BOTTG has powerful season opener

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

If you're expecting Neil Simon's usual wit, irony and funny lines in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's (BOTTG) season opener, you won't get it, but you will get a sterling performance from a stellar cast and a lot of food for thought about families and what they can do to and for each other.

This 1991 Pulitzer Prize- and Tony award-winning autobiography is full of the hurtful barbs only families can inflict, some of which are so sharp we laugh through our tears. And Simon makes it abundantly clear abuse is not exclusive to men; gorgon grandmothers projecting their own pain on everyone around them also perpetuate the cycle.

Which is not to say *Lost in Yonkers* is grim, far from it, it is funny, poignant and hits close to home for anyone raised by less-than-perfect elders. It also says

clearly that people can change.

The most astonishing performance is given by a 13-year-old going on 30, Jeremy Kreamer, with just a week to go before opening night, stepped into the role of Jay and made it his own so thoroughly it was hard to imagine anyone else in the part. His accent and looks, both bequeathed by parents from New York, were perfect, his presence assured, his energy high and his body language spoke volumes.

All this while the Fairfield youth is currently in rehearsal for two other plays: A Comedy of Errors in Suisun and Oliver in Vacaville. Even though he is being home schooled so he can concentrate on his stage career, it is an impressive performance.

Asked how she had the nerve to replace a major actor a week before opening night, Vallejo director Carlene Collier Coury said it was the actor's choice.

"Then we found some theater magic and were blessed with Jeremy."

Kreamer is backed by strong performances from Matthew Surrence of Richmond as Uncle Louie, the gangster/thief with the mobile face and body who stands up to his matriarch mother ("Just remember, whatever I've accomplished this life, you're my partner"), and Benicia's Siobhan O'Brien as the



The cast of Benicia Old Town Theater's *Lost in Yonkers*. Back row: Jonessa Britton (Gert), Roque Gutierrez (Eddie), Matthew Surrence (Louie) and Jeremy Kreamer (Jay). Front row: Siobhan O'Brien (Bella), Claire Gardner (Grandmother) and Cole Harry (Arty).

cia's Siobhan O'Brien as the insightful and simple Bella who looks like Fergie, sounds like Penny Marshall and evoked sympathy, not pity, from the 80 or so opening-nighters who backed her in her uneven match with her mother.

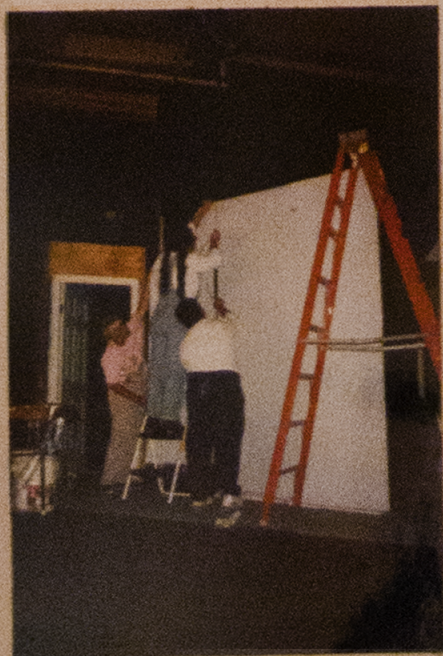
"I have had anger in me for a long time," declares Fairfield's Claire Gardner as Grandmother with ramrod

spine and eagle eye spotting any error, potential error or thought of committing an error in the two grandsons parked on her doorstep. Wisely, Gardner didn't overpower the role, allowing Simon's lines to be even stronger in dispassion.

Arty, played by Benicia's Cole Harry, was a bright presence as the young Simon tak-

ing in the interplay of his older brother and extended family, while father Eddie, played by Benicia's Roque Gutierrez, was just soft enough to contrast nicely with his matriarch mother. Jonessa Britton of Vacaville as sister Gert kept her own neuroses just barely under control enough to complete the crooked family tree.

Lost in Yonkers is a treat, a revelation, a laugh, an enjoyable evening out and a strong opening for BOTTG's 38th season. It runs for the next three weekends. Call 746-1269 for ticket information.



ROSSMOOR NEWS OCTOBER 31, 2001

REVIEW

"Lost in Yonkers" is a poignant and remarkable play

By Charles Jarrett



Your best bet for theatre this week is at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, which is presenting Neil Simon's "Lost in Yonkers." Under the articulate direction of Carlene Collier Coury, this is a truly remarkable production of this poignant and comic play.

When Simon was recently interviewed and asked what show or what character was his favorite, he said, "Bella, unequivocally my favorite character is Bella. I have never let go of Bella." Perhaps after you see this Bella, you will know why!

In "Lost in Yonkers" he tells the story of two brothers, Arty and Jay (Cole Harry and Jeremy Kreamer) who are forced (following the death of their mother) by their father's financial problems to live with a German grandmother whom nobody in the family cares for. Bella (Siobhan O'Brien) is an aunt who lives with grandma. She is a young woman in her 30s who has remained childlike and requires her mother's financial.

Grandma Kurnitz (Claire Gardner) suffered some terrible indignities as a child in Nazi Germany and eventually escaped from Germany with her six children. Against great odds she and her family managed to survive by running a small candy, ice cream and soda parlor. Following the untimely deaths of two of her children, Rose and Aaron, she became terribly bitter and closed herself off from her other children, perhaps not wanting to be hurt again. In addition, she wanted to make her children strong so that they would survive as well. As a consequence of this, she has become a very cold and hardened woman.

The boy's father, Eddie (Roque Gutierrez), has borrowed a lot of money from a loan shark to provide his dying wife with as much help as he could in her final days and hours. The only way he can pay these debts is to take a job that requires that he stay on the road for almost a full year. He consequently does the last thing in the world that he would want to do; he goes to his estranged mother and asks for her help in taking his boys while he works in this traveling job.

The entire cast is superb! While both boys are outstanding, Jeremy Kreamer is a super star; he's got the character pegged. He has the New York accent down perfectly and has great timing. He understands the role and

delivers it as professionally as one could imagine. There is another key character, Uncle Louie (played to absolute perfection by Matthew Surrence), who is a criminal type, a bag man, a numbers runner, a guy one step ahead of the other gangsters who are looking for him. Surrence is simply bigger than life and he makes his character live!

Siobhan O'Brien delivers a Bella that is sweet, caring, vivacious, uplifting, and childlike, but with the full bloom of womanhood freshly fashioned, a gift that is rare and beautiful beyond description. She could wring tears from a rock with her poignant, comic and blissful characterization.

This outstanding production plays weekends in the BDES Hall at 140 West J street in Benicia. For information, call (707) 748-1773.

Lost and found: O'Brien discovers fateful role in 'Yonkers'

By RICHARD FRIEDMAN
Times Herald staff writer

About 15 years ago, Cushman O'Brien ran into Academy Award winner Marlon Brando on a bus in San Luis Obispo, Calif., who eventually won an Oscar for "Fahrenheit 451." It was a production of the Spring Theater.

O'Brien was 12 at the time. "I told her how much I wanted to be an actress and she said, 'Go for it. You'll be great,'" O'Brien recalled. "I was forever enough to start her."

Apparently, the encouragement worked with a sprinkle of coincidence. O'Brien finds her way to "Lost in Yonkers" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. Brando played the same role of "Belle" in the movie version, co-starring Richard Dreyfuss.

"I love the way Marlon did it," O'Brien said. "She was amazing." Not that O'Brien copies the screen actress. Admission is not cheap. Copying is another.

"I watch other actors," O'Brien said. "But I try to get my own sense of what I want to do with the character. You're you. You don't want to copy someone else."

O'Brien was in the middle of rehearsal, gearing up for the



CUSHMAN O'BRIEN plays Belle in "Lost in Yonkers" at the ICES Hall in Benicia.

"Yonkers" opening Oct. 16. "It is hilarious and the character is fun to play," she continues. "She's a little slave, full of life and love. She loves her family very much. I put a lot of myself in her. At the same time, I am playing her character."

O'Brien definitely has a family to be in and this. And acting is a big part of it. Her father, Robert "D.D." O'Brien, is a veteran actor. And her mom, Jane, is teaching everybody how to act with a New York accent. That's helpful.

"My parents," Cushman said,

If you go...
■ What: Lost in Yonkers
■ Where: Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
■ Where: 140 West J St.
■ When: Oct. 19-Nov. 11
For more info, call: 745-0909

with her dad and finds it comforting. "I'm very confident on stage with my dad. He's such a great actor," she said. "There's no feeling like working with your dad on stage. It's really cool."

The only time O'Brien missed her father is when he landed a role in a play she auditioned for but failed to get.

"I was squinting in my seat," she said. "And I didn't like the way the actress was doing it. I wasn't pulling a dive thing. I was just a little nervous."

O'Brien, 28, accepts community theater roles when she can

around her occupation job for medical/dental broken in San Ramon.

"It's a good job. I like it," she said, though adding nothing to the theater.

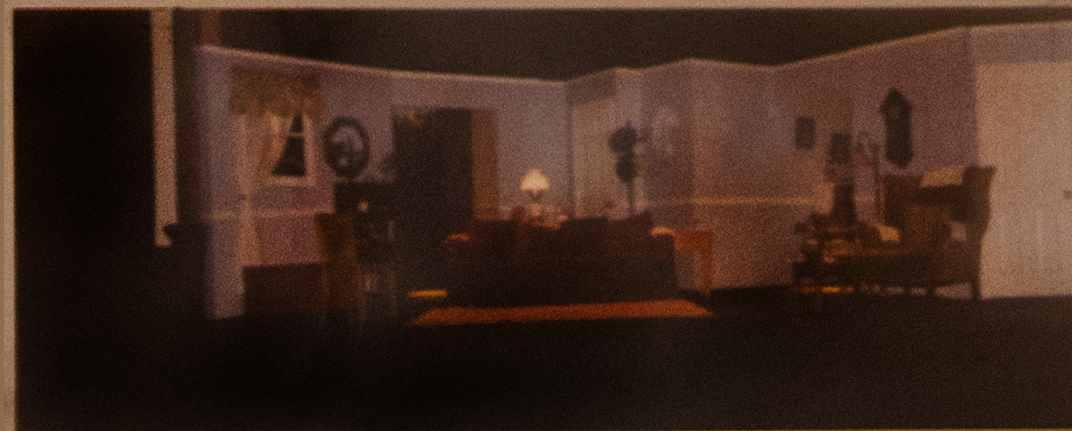
"If I couldn't do it anymore, that would hurt me because I love it so much," she said. "I grew up around it. I love walking on stage and performing. I've always been that way ever since I was a kid. To me, theater is that magical place, a place you can tell a story."

There are no immediate plans after "Lost in Yonkers" closes Nov. 11, O'Brien said.

"I'm just sending out resumes. If another play comes along, I'll definitely audition again," she said.

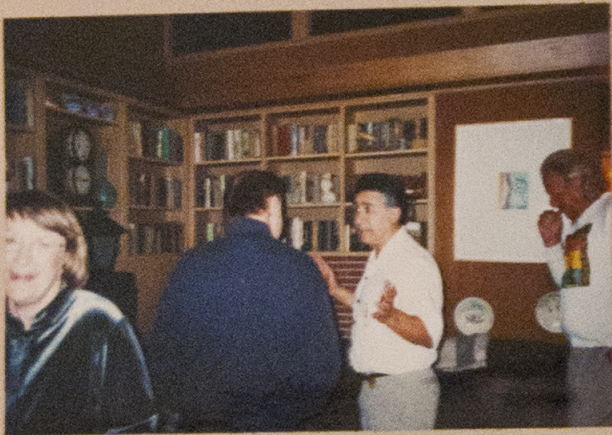
O'Brien said she's looking forward to "Yonkers" opening, seeing her creativity in the second go-round with the same work. She played the same role for the Hayward Little Theatre three years ago when she won an award for supporting actress.

"I'm not really one for awards," O'Brien said. "At the same time, it's nice to be acknowledged for the part you played. I think playing the part is a reward in itself."





ADELE MARGRAVE
KEVIN McCALL AWARD RECIPIENT
LOST IN YONKERS -- FALL 2001





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Xmas Party 2001 Donna + B Telepak's Home

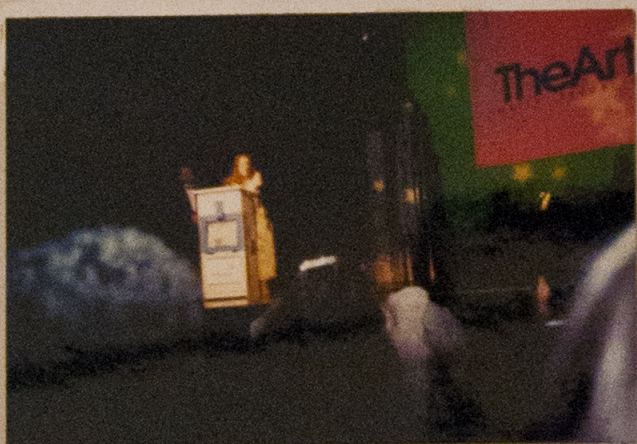


The Artys

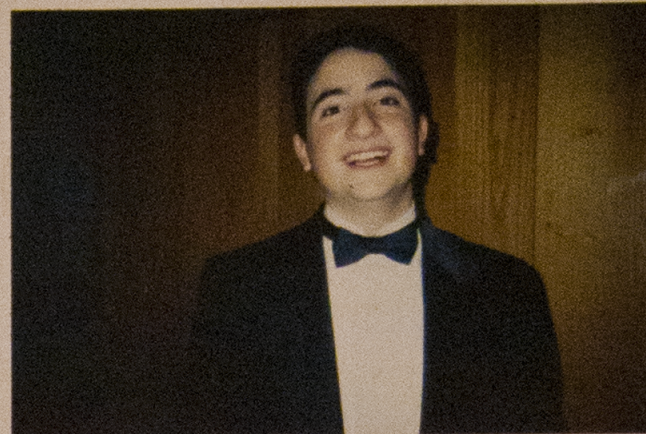
18th Annual Awards



SIOBHAN O'BRIEN
BEST LEAD ACTRESS IN A COMEDY
LOST IN YONKERS -- BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP



JEREMY KREAMER
BEST FEATURED YOUTH IN AN ADULT SHOW
LOST IN YONKERS -- BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP



READERS THEATRE



SHAUN CARROLL

IN BRIEF

Shaun Carroll of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group will present Readers Theatre, a dramatic reading of six popular children's stories, on Jan. 19 at 12:30 p.m. at the Benicia Public Library located at 150 East J Street.

Carroll will read, "Yertle the Turtle," "Star-Bellied Sneetches," "Boy Meets Girl," "The Sweetest Fig," "The Giving Tree," and "The Yax." The event is free. For more information call 746-5526 or email moesdaddy@earthlink.net.

The BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

presents

****Dramatic Readings of 6 popular children's stories****

Fun for all ages!!!
Come join in the excitement of
seeing books come alive!!

Free at the Benicia Public Library
150 East 'J' Street

Saturday, January 19th
at 12:30 pm



A SOPHISTICATED COMEDY
BY: A. R. GURNEY

WHO: BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

WHEN: April 19 - May 12, 2002

WHERE: B.D.E.S. HALL 140 West J St., Benicia.

COST: Friday and Saturday Evenings \$15. 8 p.m.
Sunday Matinees: Adults: \$12. Seniors/Students \$10.
4 p.m.

CHAMPAGNE GALA: Friday, April 19th. \$18. 8 p.m.

QUESTIONS: (707) 745-0316

GROUPS OF 10 OR MORE ONLY: (707) 746-1269

Illustration by Christine Davenier from Madeline L'Engle "The Other Dog" reprinted with permission from SEASTAR BOOKS.

Goin' to the dogs



PHOTO BY TSONEM

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

The crew from Benicia Old Town Theater Group (BOTTG) trotted out their canines at the recent Mardi Gras parade to promote not only dog adoptions, but their newest play *Sylvia*, which is billed as a canine comedy.

In their 38th season of award-winning theater, BOTTG will host a champagne gala on opening night April 19.

The four person cast includes Napa's Leslie Waggoner as Sylvia, the dog who teaches an old couple new tricks. The couple are

Kate, played by Rose Marie Sweeney from Vallejo and Greg, played by Martinez' Gary Muz.

ARTY, award-winning veteran Joe Guistino from Benicia got not one, but three parts: a man, a woman and a neither/both.

"I get neurotic enough playing one part in a show," he said. "playing three very different parts has me borderline psychotic."

"What fun."

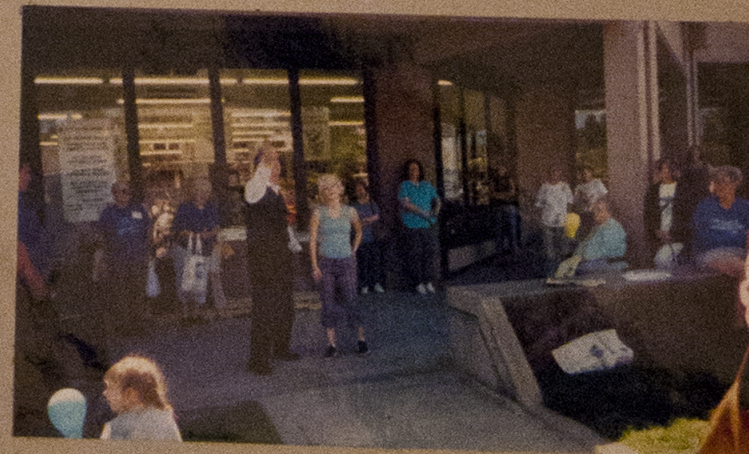
Sylvia, by A.R. Gurney, plays through May 12. Friday and Saturday tickets are \$15, seniors \$12, for 8 p.m. shows. Sundays tickets are \$12/\$10 for 4 p.m. per-

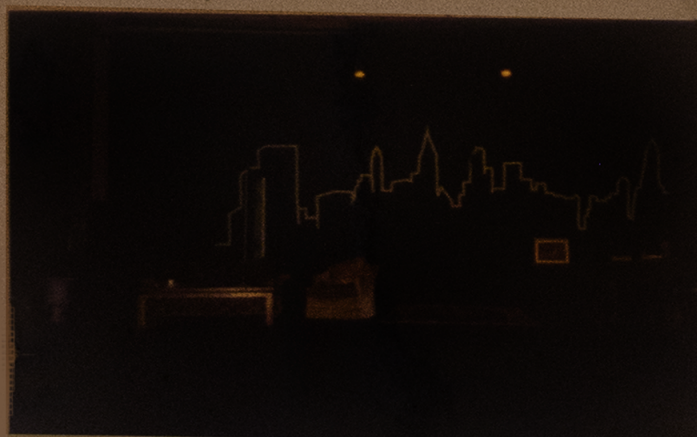
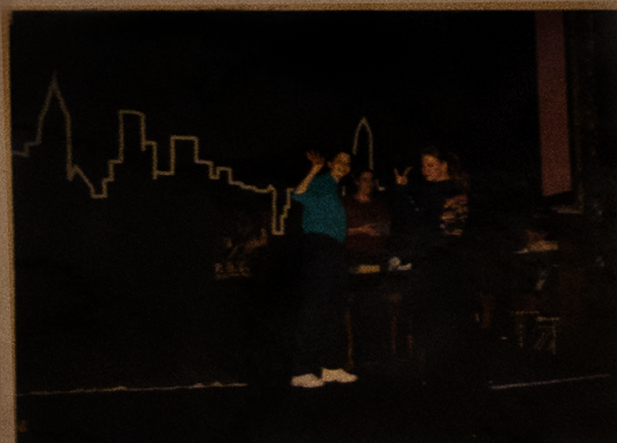
formances, all at the door.

Reservations for the \$18 April 19 gala only will be taken by Patti Wallace, 81 West L Street, Benicia.

Groups of ten or more can reserve at 746-1269.

Call 745-0316 for information.





Canine comedy delivers

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

LESLIE
HERALD

"Sylvia" is doggone funny at times. The Benicia Old Town Theater Group's seventy-somethingth play in 38 years tries for a statement on what used to be called mid-life crisis in men (and, apparently, is now called male menopause) and empty nest for women (but is now apparently a new life) by investigating an anthropomorphic relationship between an aging man and the stray dog he brings home (instead of a crimson Corvette or pre-pubescent mistress).

BOTTG president Adele Margrave, who was the audition phone contact for director Renee Grinnell, says a lot of young Bay area women desired the title role of the dog that Napa's Leslie Waggoner got.

Waggoner gives it a tail-wagging energy complete with a limpid eyed, heart winning ways that carries the play despite the fact that the 20-year-old Solano College student is an admitted cat lover who went to a park to study dogs after winning the part.

For the first three minutes or so, I thought her poodle/Lab mutt's boundless sofa-jumping enthusiasm was undetectable from a two-year-old's when I realized they're really the same.

Oddly enough, of the four cast members, three are cat owners and the role of the dog hater is played by the only dog owner among them, Rose Marie Sweeney of Vallejo, who was able to give valuable advice on canine antics to Waggoner.

The hit of the evening had to be local Joe Guistino in all of his metamorphoses. First as philosophy-spouting Joe Six-pack fellow dog owner Tom, he clues in dog-besotted Greg ("I have to remind myself to kiss my wife before I say hello to Bowser") while his dog Bowser does the same for Sylvia. Next he towers onstage in high heels as the wife's old school friend Phyllis, who, with a tip of the hat to Tootsie, keeps the audience teetering on the edge of their seats in laughter as she is assaulted by Sylvia. His final incarnation of Leslie, the gender-bending shrink, polishes off whatever claim to serious drama he may have had claim to and lets the comic side reign.



Joe Guistino as Tom is wooed by poodle/Lab pooch Sylvia (Leslie Waggoner), the complicating factor in BOTTG's spring comedy of the same name playing through May.

PHOTO BY PATTI WALLACE

Perhaps the most difficult part was Kate, the apparently dog-hating wife who has seized her day after the kids left home to change careers and is bent on being a success. A dog, with all its responsibilities in the city, is a new child she doesn't want and she has no intention of giving up her freedom.

Played with commanding stature by Sweeney, Kate becomes more sympathetic as the play progresses and finally redeems herself in the denouement.

Gary Mutz of Martinez had a challenge with Greg: to make him likeable as he loses his mind, job and wife over a dog. Mutz, who has won two Shellie awards, manages not to slide into pathos and we do, indeed, like him.

Stage manager Amanda Walker has used the stage of the historic Portuguese Hall cleverly, with a sky New York skyline that lights up at night and a city park that spreads out from the normally-unused apron.

"Sylvia" is funny, at times soaring to hilarious. Playwright A. R. Gurney wrote two versions, one with cleaner language than the other. BOTTG has chosen the cleaner version, but be prepared for what used to be called swear words — although nothing any middle schooler hasn't heard.

See Dog, page A12

Dog

Continued from page A1

"Sylvia" is physical, studded with slapstick scenes like the one with Sylvia in heat or the romp, when Kate and Sylvia square off over Greg on the stage floor practically licking each other.

You can take home a message from a preachy pooch or sit back and laugh. Gurney and BOTTG allow you either option.

"Sylvia" grows on you. As always, it's a collaborative effort from dozens of local BOTTG theater fans who gave up their time to create sets, design costumes, work the lights, bartend or spread the word to attract audiences.

"Sylvia" plays through May 12 at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays for \$15 (seniors \$12) and Sundays at 4 p.m. for \$12/\$10



Greg (Gary Mutz of Martinez) shares a howl with Sylvia (Leslie Waggoner of Napa) in BOTTG's spring comedy playing now through May 12.

at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street. Tickets at the door.

PHOTO BY PATTI WALLACE



Wednesday, May 1, 2002

THEATER REVIEW: *Sylvia*

BeniciaNews.com

By Geraldine "Cynthia" Gomez

A.R. Gurney's *Sylvia*, about a love triangle involving husband, wife and poodle, is a play with humor and fancy, insight, poignancy and romance. In short, the play is a unique and multifaceted story whose title character distills the essence of a dog into human form.

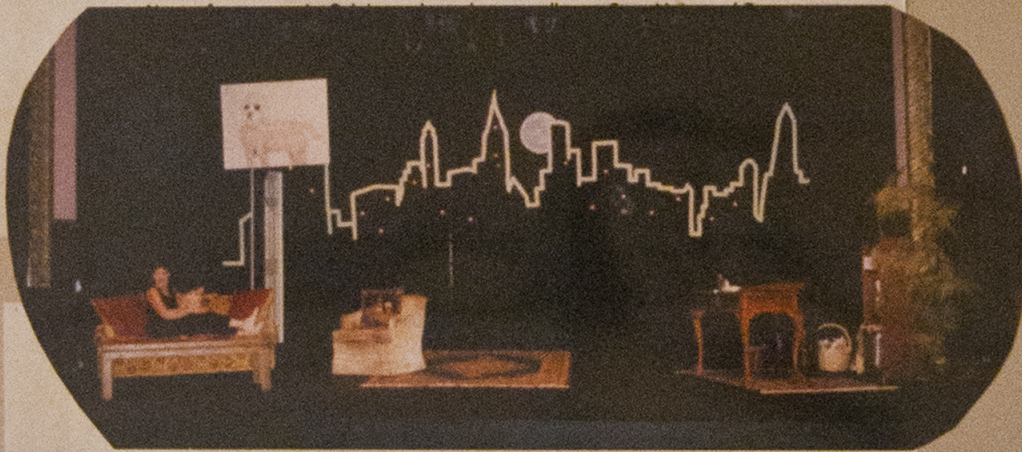
In the hands of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, *Sylvia* is an expertly executed, sophisticated Broadway-style comedy that probably comes close to the original New York version.

The set nicely reflects the story's location. Its black-and-white New York skyline with city lights is a backdrop for the comfortably furnished living room of a preppy Manhattan couple.

The conflict between woman and dog over their man begins as soon as man brings home an abandoned stray, whom he names Sylvia. Initially, Kate seems to dislike Sylvia simply out of fussiness. But soon she resents having to fight for her husband's attention and affection.

Greg is clearly head over heels out of his senses with Sylvia. He spends his every minute with her, and almost his every word is about her. Greg bonds with his new best friend during walks in the park and around the neighborhood, in scenes that are lightheartedly engaging.

Kate becomes so fed up with playing second fiddle to the family pet that she uses her friend Phyllis to vent her distress. It all comes to a head in wildly funny scenes where husband and wife meet with a psychiatrist. But the sessions with the shrink ultimately lead the unhappy family toward deeper and more mature directions.



Mutz is affable and amusingly convincing as the loving but inattentive husband obsessed with "another woman" in his life: his dog. And he is credible when later he realizes the error of his ways. Sweeney, as Kate, conveys a strong-willed academic professional presence. Her catty envy of, and battles with, Sylvia are believable and interesting.

The performances of Joe Guistino and Leslie Waggoner are each a tour de force. Guistino is hilariously different in each of his three roles: a male biker; a Jewish kaffeeklatsch female friend; and the androgynous psychiatrist.

Finally, Waggoner as Sylvia superbly portrays a dog's actions, appearance, aura and movements, as closely as a human possibly could. She is costumed in clownishly chic, glamorous poodle fashions. Among her verbal and physical canine tricks are suddenly jumping, running and barking for no apparent reason. Exuding the childlike innocence of an adorable pet, she imitates the constant, buoyant energy of a hyper dog as well as its relaxed sprawling on a sofa, a chair, the floor.

Sylvia is a well-directed play with fairly fast pacing and good use of the talent. There is hardly a dull moment from start to finish.

This a production in which a great story meets smooth direction and outstanding talent. Original and funny, it offers a sophisticated, polished look and ambience, with winning performances all around. *Sylvia* plays weekends through Sunday, May 12.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group *Sylvia*

Where BDES Hall *140 West J St.* Benicia

When 8 pm Fri-Sat, 4 pm Sun

Friday, April 26, through Sunday, May 12, 2002

Playwright: A.R. Gurney

Director: Renee Grinnell

Cast: Leslie Waggoner as Sylvia, Gary Mutz as Greg, Rose Marie Sweeney as Kate, Joe Guistino as Tom, Phyllis and Leslie

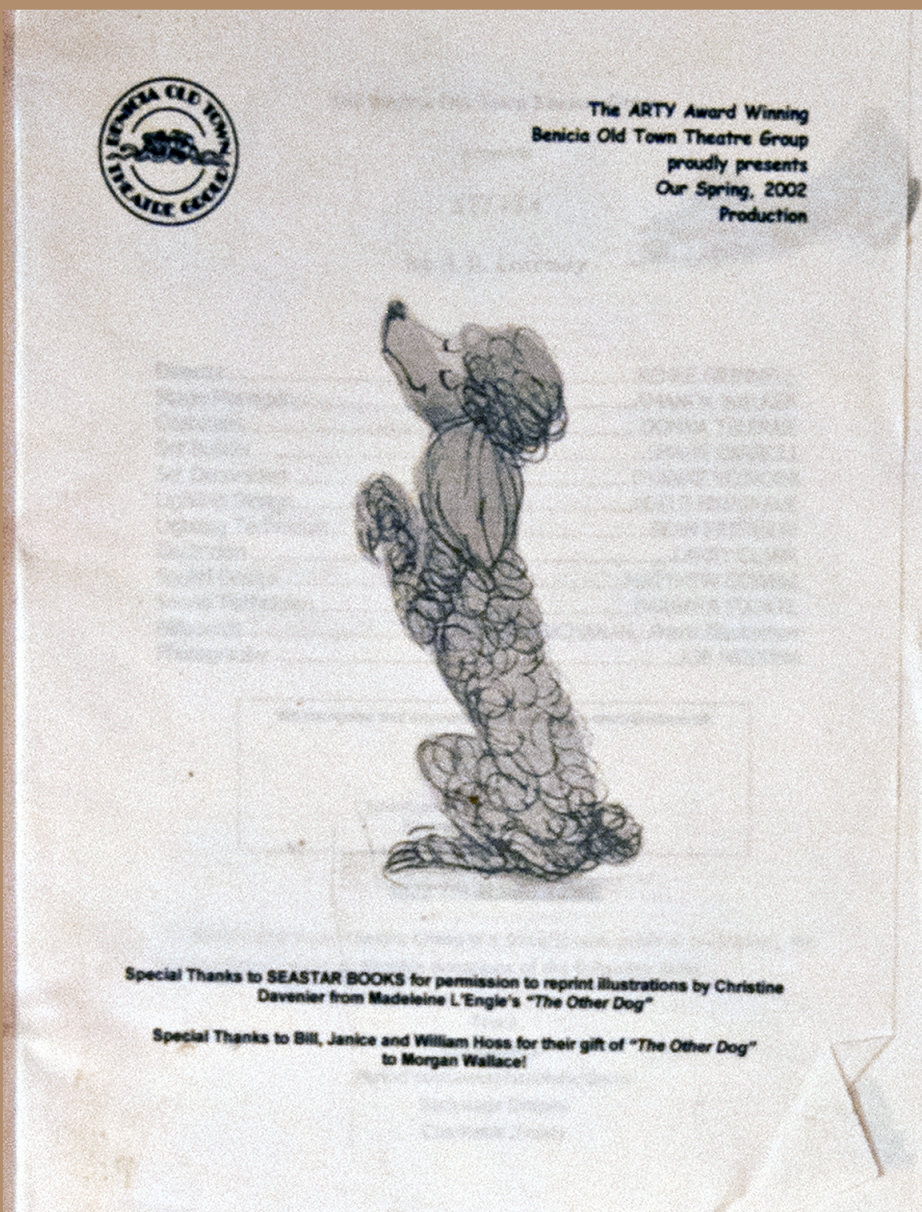
Tickets \$15 general / \$12 seniors and students, Fri-Sat

\$12 / \$10, Sun matinees **Phone:** 707-745-3325



DONNA TELEPAK
KEVIN MCCALL AWARD RECIPIENT
SYLVIA -- SPRING 2002





BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATER GROUP

Arty Awards

2001

Siobhan O'Brien	Lead Actress	Comedy	Lost in Tonkers
Jeremy Kraemer	Youth in		
	Adult Show	Comedy	Lost in Tonkers

1997

Matthew Davis	Lead Actor	Comedy	Bullshot Crummond
John Blitt	Supporting Actor	Comedy	Bullshot Crummond
David Roster	Director	Comedy	Bullshot Crummond

1996

Richard Howarter	Supporting Actor	Musical	Little Shop of Horrors
BOTTG	Continuing Excellence Award		

1995

Joe Gustino	Supporting Actor	Comedy	Rumors
F.J. Bayless	Supporting Actress	Comedy	Rumors
Ted Curry	Director	Comedy	Rumors
Rumors	Outstanding Comedy		

1994

David Roster	Director	Comedy	Bleacher Bums
Bleacher Bums	Outstanding Comedy		
Kate O'Neil	Supporting Actress	Musical	Annie
Audrey Kinnaman	Costume Design	Musical	Annie

1993

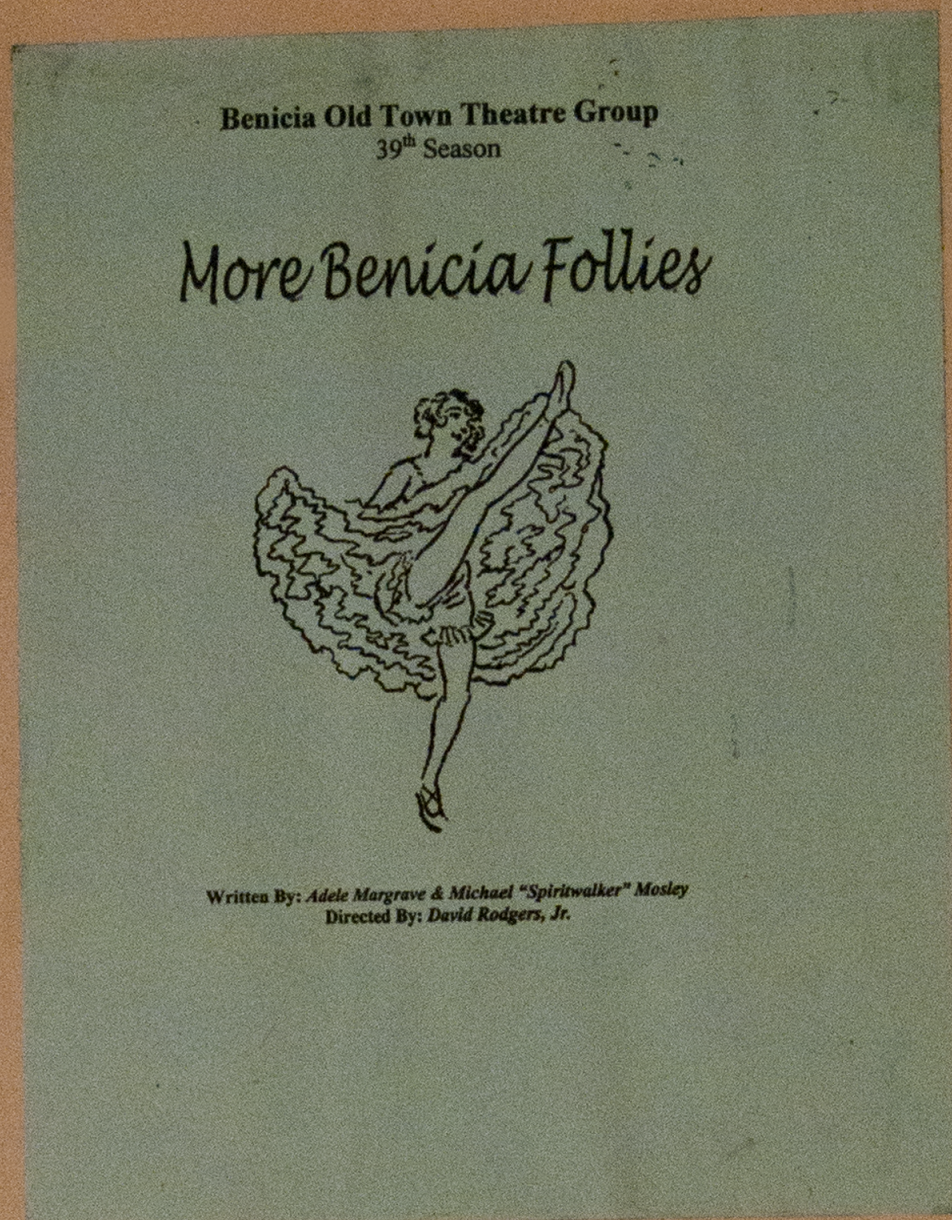
Lia Jett	Lead Actress	Comedy	Passion of Dracula
Adam Lazarre	Director Musical		A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
Audrey Kinnaman	Costume Design		A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum



4th
of
July
2002



FUNDRAISER- WINE TASTING 2002



The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
presents

MORE BENICIA FOLLIES

by Adele Margrave
&
Michael ("Spiritwalker") Moseley

Director.....	DAVID RODGERS
Musical Director.....	MICHAEL MOSELEY
Costumes.....	DONNA TELEPAK
Set Decoration.....	DYANNE VOJVODA
Lighting Design.....	DAVID CORY
Sound Engineer.....	LARRY CLARK
Sound Technician.....	TREA MOODY
Spot Light.....	JUSTIN HOBBS
Photography.....	JOE MESSINA

The Benicia Old Town Theatre wishes to acknowledge and thank
the BDES for the use of their hall

BOTTG Wish List

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We would
appreciate tax deductible donations of the following items:

Truck
Computer(s)
Period costumes/furniture/decor
Charitable Trusts

- There will be one 15 minute intermission
- Use of flash photography is prohibited
- BOTTG is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such all donations are tax deductible
- BOTTG is a member of Theatre Bay Area, Benicia Chamber of Commerce, Arts Benicia, Solano County Arts Council, and the Vallejo Arts Council



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

It has been a great pleasure to work with Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. We have faced a road full of twists and turns and sometimes one-ways, but the end result is what you see tonight. A group of people who love the theatre so much they present, to you, their best talents. This was my first song-parody type show to direct. I cannot express how much fun it has been to work with a group of dedicated individuals. "More Benicia Follies" was unique in the fact that I had the opportunity to have the playwright in my presence and be able to share concepts and ideas. My original idea was to make it into a Saturday Night Live sketch. In many ways I was successful, the only difference is we are poking fun at historical figures from decades ago. The finale is an interesting and comedic look at cheesy Broadway choreography purposely not done well. I hope you laugh hysterically as much as I did after first choreographing it. I would like to thank Pam, Dyanne and the rest of the tech support of Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. Thanks so much and enjoy the show.

David Rodgers, Jr.

Stage Manager: Kyle Cruz
Light Tech: Sarah Maas
Spot Light Tech: Justin Hobbs
Sound Tech: Trea Marie Devlin
Microphone Tech: Hannah Rice
Backstage Tech: Justin Moody
Asst. Stage Manager/Tech: Valarie Macdonald

Benicia Old Town Theatre extends hearty thanks to all that made this production possible. We do our best to recognize all that have worked hard, but we sometimes, unintentionally, omit a name or two. If your name was not mentioned, we extend our apologies, please let a Board Member know of the error.

Thank you,
BOTTG



Benicia Mayor, councilman and Police Commissioner James Lamos (Gregg Anton) finds himself surrounded by Lido ladies in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest edition of hysterical history called "More Benicia Follies," a raucous musical review playing at the BDES Hall through Nov. 10. The hussies are, from left, Lorie Perry, Shelli Croes, and Cathy Garrett. Tickets are at the door an hour before the curtain rises at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 6 p.m. Sundays.

CAST

Narrator.....Alma Pader-Williams
 Robert Semple.....Bob Cunningham
 Edward Von Pfister.....Geno Anton
 Charles Stone.....Michael Moseley
 Major Gen. Persifer Smith.....Bob McIver
 Lt. William Sherman.....Eddie Payne
 Capt. Ulysses Sherman.....Jarrett Donham Battenburg
 Soldier.....Justin Moody
 George Horatio Derby.....David Coury
 Crew Derry.....Justin Moody
 James Lemos.....Jarrett Battenburg
 Hussies.....Bhakti Cross, Cathy Garrett, Liliana Alam,
 Katrina Jacobson
 Ladies Improvement Club.....Deidre Cruz, Liz Stallings,
 Virginia Vafa, Lois Weiss
 William Crooks.....Bob McIver
 James Lemos.....Geno Anton
 Phillip Fry.....Geno Anton
 Claude Imus.....Eddie Payne
 Ernie Gallardo.....Bob Cunningham
 Gertrude Gallardo.....Lana Perry
 Solomon Rose.....Jarrett Battenburg

Director's Notes

It has been a great pleasure working with the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. We have faced a road full of twists and turns, and sometimes one-ways, but the end result is what you see tonight: a group of people who love the theatre so much they present to you their best talents. I cannot express how much fun it has been to work with a group of dedicated individuals. *More Benicia Follies* was a new experience for me as it was the first time I directed a song parody type show and it provided my first opportunity to work with one of the playwrights, sharing ideas and concepts. My original idea was to make it into a *Saturday Night Live* sketch – the only difference is that we are poking fun at historical figures from decades ago. The finale is an interesting and comedic look at cheesy Broadway choreography purposely not done well. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did while choreographing it. I would like to thank Patti, Dyanne, and the rest of the tech support of BOTTG.



Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Liliana Alam: Liliana is a newcomer to the theatre world and is extremely excited to be performing in this production. Her "show biz" experience includes being a salsa and/or hip-hop dancer for a variety of shows in Hawaii, California, and Pennsylvania; and dressing as a man (only for theatre!) to play Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, Juno in *The Tempest* for a Hawaiian Shakespeare Festival. She also claims to have played trees in her elementary school musicals. This summer she had her first "techie" experience working as a stage technician for Diablo Valley College's *The Music Man*. She recently celebrated her sweet 16th Birthday!

Geno Anton: Born in Greenpoint Brooklyn, Geno has lived in Benicia for 12 years. He is making his third Follies appearance having played roles in *Benicia Follies* and *Benicia Follies Too!* for BOTTG. He recently played Alex Hammond, the hard-drinking drama critic, in *The Nerd* at MIRA Theatre, as well as J.J. Brown in Vallejo Music Theatre's *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. His other entertainment credits include being Master of Ceremonies at Benicia events such as Christmas at the Clocktower and Arts in the Park.

Jarrett Donham Battenburg: Born in Hollywood, CA, he is now in service in our nation's military at Travis AFB in Fairfield. Jarrett has been acting since he was eleven in plays including *Carousel*, *Best of Broadway*, *Oliver*, *Les Miserables*, and *Cats*. He was also an extra in the film *Inventing the Abbotts* and has performed in several commercials.

David Coury: David has played the roles of "Ticky" Waldgrave in *The Nerd*, and *Mr. Daigle* in *The Bad Seed*, both with the MIRA Theatre in Vallejo. He has also done numerous lighting and sound designs for which he has received three Arty Awards. The multi-talented David has been working on and behind the stage designing the lights for *More Benicia Follies*. This is his first musical as a performer.

Bhakti Cross: Originally hailing from Naperville, IL, Bhakti is a BOTTG veteran having appeared in *Benicia Follies*, *Benicia Follies Too!* and now *More Benicia Follies*. Her Follies notoriety led to her playing illustrious citizens from Benicia's past (Eleanor Walsh and Gertrude Howard Gallardo) in living history for events with the Benicia Historical Society. Her film experience includes being a principal in Columbia Pictures' *The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking*, as well as a Dancer in *Whoopee Boys*.

Bob Cunningham: This is Bob's first appearance in a stage production if any kind. He did, however, perform in his high school advanced voice, and sat first chair Bass Violin in the Sonoma County Junior Symphony over 30 years ago. A friend suggested he audition for the Follies. He is thrilled to have been selected for the role of Robert Semple and expresses his gratitude to everyone involved for their support and encouragement.

Deidre Cruz: After a six year hiatus raising her children, Deidre is thrilled to be back on stage again. Previous credits include Rose in *Gypsy* with Pinole Community Players; The Baker's Wife in *Into the Woods* at Fairfield Civic Theatre; Mrs. Bedwin in *Oliver*; and Eva in *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* with Solano College Theatre; Carrie in *Carousel* at Falstaff Dinner Theatre; and Hattie in *Kiss Me Kate* with Hayward Little Theatre. This is her first time performing for BOTTG. An interior designer by trade, a desk-top publisher by day her love of musical theatre has also led her to explore set and costume design. She is most proud of her supportive family and her wonderful Cadette Girl Scout Troup #644!

Cathy Garrett: Having lived in Benicia off and on her whole life, Cathy is no stranger to BOTTG appearing a teacher in *Yesterday* and a hussy in *Benicia Follies Too!*. Other theatrical experience includes roles in *Dark Side*, *Batman the Play*, and the *Breakfast Club*. She also has appeared in some

"B- Movies": *Suicide Pact* and *The Majestic Massacre* (filmed at Benicia's own Majestic Theater!). When she was 18 years old she was cast for a role on the TV Series *My Three Sons* playing the wife of the eldest son – but she decided not to take the part since she was afraid to fly!

Bob McIver: Bob is proud to point out that he is the only member of AARP in the cast. Age discrimination being no factor with this show, Bob claims to be "barely younger than George Burns."

Justin Moody: Justin is a middle school student from Fairfield. He is proud to be debuting with BOTTG. He'd like to thank his Mom and Dad for their support. He looks forward to doing more shows in the future.

Michael "SpiritWalker" Moseley is a published author, songwriter, playwright, musician, magician, singer, actor, director and producer. On the West Coast, he has appeared in Solano College's productions of "The Music Man" and "Sonnets for an Old Century;" in North Bay Opera's "The Ballad of Baby Doe" and in Dark Room Production's "King Lear" before co-writing, serving as music director for and appearing in "More Benicia Follies." He is honored to have been able to write several of the songs and most of the script for "Follies" and wishes to thank Adele Margrave for her inspiration and the opportunity to be a part of this production. He would also like to thank his lovely wife Julia for her love and support, without which this whole thing would not have been possible.

Alma Pader-Williams: Alma has 20 years of community theatre experience including several productions with BOTTG: *Sugar Babies*, *Benicia Follies*, *Benicia Follies Too!* and now *More Benicia Follies*.

She has enjoyed all her Follies fun, and was thrilled to be nominated for an Arty for her role as Concepcion Arguello in *Benicia Follies Too!* She received her theatre training from Bakersfield College, California State University, Hayward, Asian American Theater, Verna Winters Acting Studio and vocal coach Melissa

Philippe. By day, a Case Manager and Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Alma and her husband Todd live in Vallejo.

Lana Perry: Lana is happy to join BOTTG for her first production in Benicia. She has always loved the stage but left to raise a family. In the Bay area she has worked with other groups, such as The Onstage Theatre, the Rheem Theatre and the Park-side Theatre, playing roles including Lorelei Lee in *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, Cherie in *Bus Stop*, Vanessa the nymphomaniac in *Play It Again Sam*, and Doris in *The Owl and the Pussycat*. Lana studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the American Conservatory Theatre. She has also done modeling, TV and commercial work and production work with RGM Productions with Fred LaCasse.

Liz Stallings: This is Liz's first production with BOTTG after many years of playing stage mother to her two beautiful and talented daughters. The Follies is a fun distraction from her day job as a psychiatric hospital administrator, although some rehearsals have left Liz feeling right at home! She enjoys singing and studies voice with Dawn Ferry of Martinez. She is a long time resident of Benicia and appreciates the support of her husband Tony and all the local history he has shared with her.

Virginia Vafa: Ginny has performed 4-part harmony with Diablo Vista Chorus, Walnut Creek Chapter of "Sweet Adelines" for several years. As a baritone for the Adelines she sang a double quartet, *Double Trouble*, and a quartet, *Bold Accord*. Recently she has had an opportunity to sing solo, rotating quarterly performances at area Senior Centers. Born and raised in Pittsburg, CA, Ginny has lived for many years in Pleasant Hill – with her daughter, Lisa, a dog, Snickers, and a cat, Highway. A newcomer to Benicia and the Follies, she says this has been a great experience. She hopes to continue learning and growing in the theatre.

(other biographies were not available at time of printing)

ONLINE EDITION DAILY REPUBLIC

FAIRFIELD-SUBSUN CITY, CALIFORNIA

Monday, Feb. 24

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ENTERTAINMENT



Adele Margrave's "Benicia Follies" series helped revitalize
the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. (photo by Mike
McCoy)

Local stars shine—Arty awards ceremony is just around
the corner

Preview

Special recognition: "More Benicia Follies," "A Nice Little
Island" singled out at Artys

FAIRFIELD — Adele Margrave has two
consuming interests: dogs and theater.

Arty Awards nominees

Drama

Rejects exultant and inane

DAILY REPUBLIC

<http://www.dailyrepublic.com/entertainment/>

Page 1 of 2

Special recognition: 'More Benicia Follies' singled out at Artys

By Shawn Miller

FAIRFIELD DAILY REPUBLIC — Adele Margrave has two consuming interests: dogs and theater. She rescues dogs and is building an animal sanctuary 30 miles outside of Redding with her husband. Margrave owns four rescued dogs now and only has so much room in her home.

Margrave is a rescuer of sorts of theater, too. Her "Benicia Follies" series revitalized the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at a time when it sorely needed revitalizing, Margrave said.

The result has been three hugely successful productions - "Benicia Follies," "Benicia Follies Too" and "More Benicia Follies" - that will be specially recognized at the 19th Annual Arty Awards on Feb. 24.

While Margrave wrote "More Benicia Follies" she wasn't able to direct the production because of a broken leg.

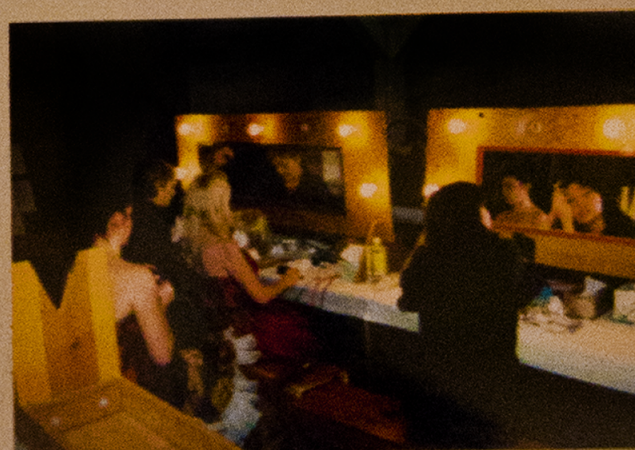
"This year I couldn't direct because I was wounded in action. But obviously ("Follies") was a success. "More Benicia Follies" received 19 nominations, the most of any production. "It was very lively. Lots of choreography, lots of movement," Margrave said of the production directed by David Rodgers Jr.

Margrave was effusive about the special recognition her "brain child" is receiving - "I was absolutely thrilled. It's great recognition. We've gone so many years where we haven't had any nominations, so this year to get so many when I'm president of BOTTG is just a thrill," she said.

"I will definitely make it to the Artys. Many of us from the theater group will be there.

"Sylvia," which was a show about a dog, which I felt particularly strongly about, is also nominated," Margrave said of another Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production.

"I would really like to see "Sylvia" win some Artys. We've invited all of the nominees to join us to have dinner and then go to the Artys."





'Benicia Follies' back on the BDES stage

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

It is perfectly in keeping with Benicia's close-but-not-quite tradition that such a small city has generated one, but there is a lively spirit of its town and its history.

The third opened Friday at the BDES Hall on West J after five weeks of rehearsal and a dress rehearsal for several actors Tuesday night.

Theater producer has a lot of a bad dress rehearsal, mean a great opening, so Friday's champagne gala must have been great. The real part about Thursday was that the indubitably clever and humorous actors couldn't be heard above the backup music. Words that could be heard were funny enough to provide enough laughter and the energy of the mostly local cast provided even more.

"Benicia Follies," the original by Adele Margrave, moved to 20-year-old Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BODTG) several years ago and "Benicia Follies" continued the tradition. "More Benicia Follies" was to last

from playwright and BODTG president, Margrave's simple words, but physical actors in a hip replacement, get an idea.

Enter Michael Muehle, a writer from Sonoma City, who took over and finished the project.

That there is a small theater—and a small theater—in Benicia's 150-year-old past is a testament to a tradition of one and all in a small town. The Benicia Follies, a small theater, is a testament to a tradition of one and all in a small town. The Benicia Follies, a small theater, is a testament to a tradition of one and all in a small town.

The 18-member cast breaks down into three proper members.

Source: Owen, page 412

* PRODUCTION VOLUNTEERS

Bartenders: Dan Clark, Dyanne Vojvoda, Steve Waranietz, Mike Downing

Cashier: Larry Clark

Costumes: Donna Telepak

Front Desk & Hall Set-Up: Alma McCartney, Jeanne Maxwell, Kay Hlavka, Vickie Maffei, Judy Reidinger, Janice Hoss, Carol Berman, Dyanne Vojvoda, Pat Wyatt

House Managers: Alma McCartney, Tim Mentz, Patti Wallace, Crystal Silva, Carlene Coury, Donna Telepak, Dyanne Vojvoda

Opening Night Gala: Patti Wallace, Valerie MacDonald, Heather MacDonald, Belinda Smith, Donna Telepak, Dyanne Vojvoda

Program: Adele Margrave

Cover Art: Lori Compton

Publicity and Advertising: Shirley King, Patti Wallace

Reservations: Patti Wallace

Set & Painting Crew: Dan Clark, John Furey, Roy Cowles, Steve Waranietz, Eric Sanders, Jeremy Clark, Laurie Backen, Evan Harkins, Valerie MacDonald, Heather MacDonald, Belinda Smith, Bridget Harkins, Brian Harkins, Gary Schmitt, Jerome Bond, Larry Clark, Bill Telepak, Jon Ivanish

(Thank you to all that whose names were not available at time of printing)

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group PRODUCTION BOARD

Adele Margrave, President
Dyanne Vojvoda, Vice President
Patti Wallace, Secretary
Donna Telepak, Treasurer
Maggie Anslow
Carlene Coury
David Coury
Jeanne Maxwell

FOLLIES

Continued from page 41

of the Ladies Improvement Club, a half dozen of what used to be called social doves and the assorted male and female, politicians, developers and socialists who formed Benicia's history.

Director David Rodgers Jr. has them singing, dancing and carrying on across two centuries, following Dona Francisca Maria Felipe Benicia Cirillo de Vallejo's (Alma Pader's) pointing finger.

Stardom include Denise Cruz as a proper lady who gives with dignity and sings with pitch and power, and Eddie Payne, who is the soul of "The Sound of the Stone Gang" number with his delightful comedic body language.

There are from five to seven houses, with lead lady Gerrie (Lana Perry) dancing and singing up a storm backed by some real characters like Bludki Cross. It is fortunate Benician Gene Anton has become a fixture in theater circles because he brings energy and a melodious voice to both Eddie Von Pflager and James Lemo.

From the rousing "What Benicia Means to Me" and "Whose Town Is It Anyway?" into drinking song of the four main men to the giddy heights of "Daisy" and the wit (and tip of the hat to the

Beulah) of "I'm a Benician," this is a fun, tongue-in-cheek, joyous show. I call it inspired to have off stage backup singers vocalize the big production number "Her Name is Gerrie," it made it almost completely intelligible.

Once the sound levels and microphones are adjusted so the singers can be heard and some enthusiastic and energetic audiences are advised to keep the energy but speak more clearly (especially during "Top Ten Reasons to Live in Benicia"), the jokes and outright puns and so-called you-odds will be far gone. ... ends to smile, chuckle or puff out, as they will undoubtedly do until the last performance on Nov. 10.

And so they don't miss a single expressive face, the lighting will, hopefully be turned up when they dance their way into the audience.

Punny, true and not fully flawed, "More Benicia Follies" is worth the price of admission. See it at the BDES Hall, 140 West J Street at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 4 p.m. on Sundays afternoons. Tickets range \$6 to \$18 are available at the door. If you can comfortably explain what the Ladies are supposed to be, bring the kids.

And oh yes, don't block the aisle.

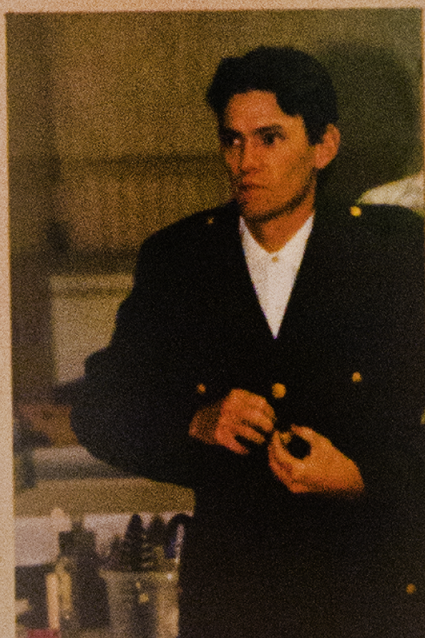


Final curtain for 'Follies'



BOTTG's last laughs are this afternoon... Benicia mayor, councilman and Police Commissioner James Lemos (Geno Anton) has been surrounded by Lido ladies for the past month in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's latest edition of hysterical history called "More Benicia Follies." The merry musical review playing at the BDES Hall closes today so make plans to spend a warm afternoon laughing at the foibles of our forefathers and -mothers. The hussies, who are perfect for their parts, are, from left, Lana Perry, Bhakti Cross, and Cathy Garrett. Tickets are at the door an hour before the curtain rises at 4 p.m.

PHOTO BY TS OWEN



Get ready to laugh

BENICIA HERALD

BOTTG presents 'Moon over Buffalo'

By TS OWEN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

The premise of the Old Town Theatre Group's new play is: Have fun.

"The comedy never stops," said award-winning director Carlene Coury. "We need laughs with the way the world is right now, so come prepared to let go and belly laugh."

Written by Ken Ludwig for Carol Burnett in 1995, "Moon Over Buffalo" is already a cherished chestnut, attracting seasoned actors from across the Bay Area to the auditions.

"I have a strong cast that is a joy to work with," she said. "This is funny, it depends on timing and physical comedy. Each has allowed me to mold them and then run with it to form their own character."

With a set rented from San Francisco, the cast could concentrate on getting that timing honed to the split seconds that make the difference between flaccid and fail-safe.

Three of the eight cast members are locals: Ivy Siegel as George Hay, Don Riblett as Paul and Claire White as Eileen. The rest range from Fairfield, Oakland and Pleasant Hill.

White, a junior at Benicia High, is already a seasoned veteran of the stage, and even though the youngest of the cast, holds her own, Coury said.

The eldest is Jamie Anderson (Eileen), although Coury wouldn't hazard a guess as to her actual age except to say she is a "senior, senior citizen" and pretty amazing as the grandmother in the crowd.

This fun is for everyone, even when George stomps around in his shorts. Don't expect any deep meanings or symbolic speeches, what you see is what you get in this classic backstage farce of misunderstandings, misdirection and malapropisms.

Briefly, it's about the has-been Hawk, an acting couple rejuvenated by the rumor that they might be cast by movie producer Frank Capra in "The Scarlet Pimpernel."



George Hay (Benicia's Ivy Siegel) falls down on his job as lead actor for his touring troupe in the Old Town Theatre Group's newest production of "Moon over Buffalo," instigating his wife Charlotte (Claire White) and getting a helping hand from actor Paul (Benicia's Don Riblett). PHOTO BY TS OWEN

He will evaluate them as he watches "Private Lives," but George has other ideas — and a bottle of whisky. Charlotte is running out of patience and the rest of the cast follows their stumbling lead as the plot doesn't thicken so much as become a man's mess.

"Come looking for a good time," said Coury, a college instructor who lives in Vallejo and has been directing for ten years. "We need healing, and this play can do that."

This is her second play for BOTTG, the first, "Lost in Yonkers," won two ARTYS and a slew of nominations, including one for Coury and a best actress for Sibbun O'Brien, who plays Rose with verve and nerve in Moon. The cast is rounded out with Fred Stoddard as their



George Hay (Benicia's Ivy Siegel) stumbles into the play "Private Lives" dressed as Cyrano de Bergerac in the Old Town Theatre Group's newest production of "Moon over Buffalo," instigating his wife Charlotte (Claire White) and shocking fellow actor Paul (Benicia's Don Riblett). The fun and mayhem continue through May 10. PHOTO BY CARL NELSON

MOON

Continued from page A1

faithful and snubbed agent Richard and Patrick Borch as Howard, a quintessential nerd.

Husband David Coury is frequently a partner when he designs

the light and sound, as he did for Moon, or even acts.

"Moon over Buffalo" runs weekends through May 10, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. Anyone who can prove they were born in Benicia or Buffalo gets in free. It's at the BDES Hall on West J. Call 746-1269 for information.



The Arts Award
Winning
Benicia Old
Town
Theatre Group
Proudly presents
Our Spring, 2003
Production

MOON

OVER

BUFFALO

BY

KEN LUDWIG

Directed by Carlene Collier Coury

Friday, April 19 through Saturday, May 10, 2003
For Information: (707) 746-1269



THEATER REVIEW: 'Moon Over Buffalo'

By **Paula McConnell** The Arty Award-winning Benicia Old Town Theatre Group does it again! The spring production, *Moon Over Buffalo*, written by Ken Ludwig, is a captivating, lighthearted farce replete with pratfalls, mistaken identities, tight comedic timing and just enough silliness to keep the audience entertained and distracted from the outside world for a solid two hours.

This is a well worthwhile show that elicits the utmost from the director's carefully selected, talented cast. In the program notes Director Carlene Collier Coury also directs the audience to laugh, and on opening night, the audience never stopped doing so.

Moon Over Buffalo is a play within a play. The time is 1953, and the place is the Erlanger Theatre, Buffalo, N.Y. It is the story of an acting family that has been making the repertory rounds for far too long, hoping with each new opening to be discovered and make the "big time."

Just when they are about to be reviewed by a well-known Hollywood producer, Murphy's Law takes them by surprise. The Hollywood producer (who never appears onstage) has arranged to see one of their stage shows in Buffalo. Everything that could possibly happen with that theatrical presentation can and does go wrong.

To round out the plot, Ludwig offers a story of nearly lost love, love renewed, family ties and influences, loyalty, passion and misguided misunderstandings.

Pulchritude abounds in this show. Each female cast member is very attractive, with seasoned, strong acting ability. Clearly one of the most talented actresses to appear on a Solano County stage is the lovely Coleen Walsh, who plays Charlotte Hay, one of the theatrical team members.

Most of Walsh's theater work has been in the Contra Costa area. And that has been Solano County's loss. She is a well-trained actress who possesses an obvious flair for comedy. Her fresh, wholesome, innocent appearance is a humorous contrast to the torn, confused, x-ray aspect of her character. Walsh contributes tremendous verve to the play.

Janet Anderson, a well-known, award-winning actress, has been seen in many productions throughout the Bay Area and is always fun to watch. Playing the mother of Charlotte Hay, she opens the show with an absolutely delightful shuffle of a dance to the tune of "It's Only a Paper Moon." Anderson also has some great lines in this show, such as "Without theater we would all be Republicans." She is obviously having fun onstage and lends great comedic touches to her character.

Clare White, who plays the romantic love interest of the lecherous Mr. Hay, is a junior at Benicia High School. White is blessed with great beauty and superior natural acting capability. If she pursues theater as her ultimate career, she will be very successful indeed.

And then there is Siobhan O'Brien, who plays Rosalind, Hay's daughter. O'Brien is a marvelous actress who won the Solano County Arty Award for best actress in 2001, and her performance as Roz is outstanding.

This play was written for a strong male lead, George Hay, played by Irv Siegel. *Moon Over Buffalo* could be the vehicle that brings Siegel full circle into his own as an actor. He takes this role to new heights and to the next level of comedy. This is possibly the best performance this reviewer has ever seen of Siegel's work. It would be very surprising if he were not nominated for award-level recognition for this portrayal. Had he not "broken the fourth theater wall" to inspect the audience on a few occasions, his performance would have been flawless. Nevertheless, Siegel alone is worth the price of admission.

Possibly one of the most believable characters within this production is Howard, played by Patrick Borch. Borch plays a quintessential nerd, managing to exude every boorish, dull intonation that only a classic nerd could deliver. Borch too is a talent to watch.

Don Riblett gives a fine interpretation as Paul, the love interest opposite Rosalind, though some of the scenes of passion between him and Roz were unconvincing.

Fred Stoddard is a "latecomer to the stage," according to the program notes. Stoddard is extremely handsome, with brilliant acting talent. He plays the part of Richard, the Hays' attorney and suitor to Charlotte. Since his is a role of a pompous, condescending, arrogant type, the director could have fleshed out this character with a more menacing interpretation. Unfortunately, Stoddard was not directed to employ the fullest extent of his ability in this role of a classic farce antagonist.

Despite a few minor opening night glitches, the lighting designed by David Coury was excellent, and the sound (David Coury and Don Riblett) was very good. The music was outstanding, appropriate to the period.

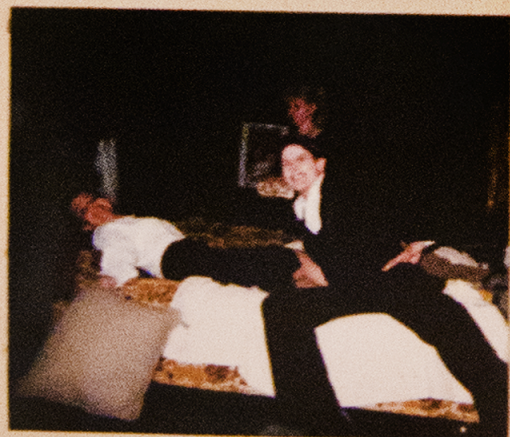
Strong kudos go to costume designers Donna Telepak and Shannon Howlett. Their selections were straight out of the period and their attention to detail was admirable. Unfortunately one of the zippers failed on a wonderful 1950s-style dress during the opening night presentation, but actress Coleen Walsh carried the minor mishap professionally, without missing a beat. An exquisite blue dress and head wrap worn by actress Siobhan O'Brien was particularly memorable.

On the whole, Collier Coury offers a tight show with impeccable timing. Despite some flat and rather amateurish blocking (stage placement of actors), the show arrives at a steady pace by the second act and lives up to its full potential for fun.

One of the lines in this play is "Buffalo is like Scranton without the charm." But overall, *Moon Over Buffalo* is good comedic farce with a great deal of charm. As one character notes, "It is like living in an asylum with the guard's day off." It is funny, slapstick and fast moving.

Despite some technical blips on opening night, (at one point, for example, a gun does not go off as planned), it is a fun-filled, action-packed romp complete with quick and well-staged entrances and exits. Audiences of all ages and sizes will be able to enjoy it. And theater-goers will not need the director's suggestion; they will laugh, laugh, LAUGH.





VALARIE McDONALD
KEVIN McCALL AWARD RECIPIENT
MOON OVER BUFFALO - SPRING 2003



Moon madness...

The Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Moon over Buffalo" just keeps getting better and funnier, says director Carlene Collier Coury. Take it in tonight or tomorrow at 8 or Sunday at 4 at the BEMS Hall.

PHOTO BY TS OWEN

Times-Herald VALLEY
Friday, April 25, 2003

THE ARTS

B3

Benicia Old Town Theatre offers hilarity

By RACHEL RASKIN-ZRIHEN

Times-Herald staff writer

"Moon Over Buffalo," the latest offering from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, is a wild carnival ride of a play.

Artfully directed for the by Carlene Collier Coury, "Moon Over Buffalo" brings to life the madcap misadventures of a company of repertory actors stuck way off Broadway in Buffalo, New York — a city described by one character as "like Scranton, but without the charm."

The production's talented, experienced cast and crew hail from several Bay Area cities, including Vallejo, Benicia, Oakland, Pleasant Hill, Pt. Richmond, San Rafael and Fairfield.

One reason Coury, an experi-

Laughter is what is really needed right now, I think. This is a great cast here, and everybody just meshed so well and so professionally."

— Carlene Collier Coury, director

enced director and English instructor at both Solano Community and Napa Valley colleges, said she agreed to direct this play, is what she sees as a general need for humor in the world.

"Laughter is what is really needed right now, I think," Coury said. "This is a great cast here, and everybody just meshed so well and so professionally."

"Moon Over Buffalo," a fast-

paced, rollicking farce written by Ken Ludwig, produces giggles and guffaws, with the second half in particular causing some audience members to laugh themselves nearly out of their chairs.

Several cast members, particularly Siobhan O'Brien as Roz and Irv Siegel as George, display professional-caliber comic timing, which is just one of several elements that converge to create hilarious mayhem in this production.

Colony Walsh as Charlotte is

reminiscent of Debbie Reynolds in her heyday. Fred Stoddard is professional and competent as Richard, as are Claire White as Elise and Janice Anderson as Ethel.

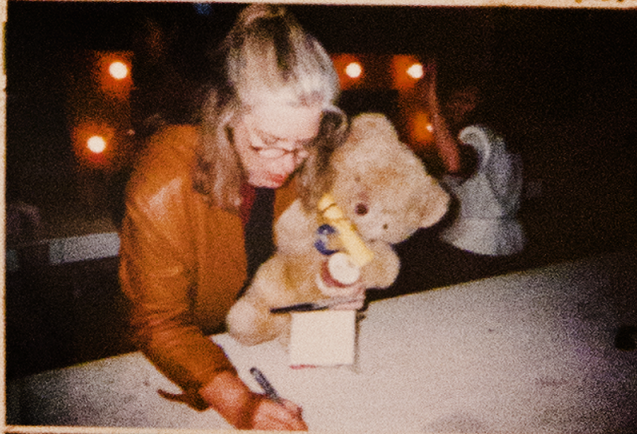
Patrick Borch is perfect as Howard, the clueless, bow-tied, bespectacled newcomer, and Don Riblett portrays Paul with just the right blend of harried insanity and suave cool.

Flawlessly executed scene and set changes add to the play's other

well-produced aspects. These include costumes and sound, which help take what should be the difficult task of bringing mad-ness and mayhem hilariously to life — complete with running, yelling, confusion and door slamming — and make it look easy.

"Moon Over Buffalo" runs week-ends through May 16, with Friday and Saturday performances beginning at 8 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 4 p.m. Tickets are \$15 to \$15, but as an added bonus, any one born either in Benicia or Buffalo, N.Y. will be admitted free when presenting their birth certificate.

Performances are held at the B.O.T.H. Hall, 144 West J St., Benicia. For tickets, groups of 10 or more or more information, call 746-1296.



New BOTTG board plans a packed season

By TS Owen
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Benicia's Old Town Theater Group (BOTTG) has a new board of directors, a fall play picked out and a very busy summer planned.

First they will make a splash in the July 3 Torchlight Parade to promote "Bus Stop," their fall production.

On July 5, they will kick off the first of three planned Shakespeare in the Park Readers Theaters in the Community Park on Rose Drive. From 1 to 3 p.m., they will have Sharon Carroll, formerly with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, provide the lighter side of Shakespeare.

The group is also hosting its first Casino Night at the RIDE Hall on July 12 from 7 to 11 p.m. Tickets for that are \$20, with proceeds going for the fall season expenses. There will be roulette, blackjack, craps, a silent auction and a no-host bar.

On July 20, they will interview candidates for director for the fall play, the second production of their 29th season. This is a paid position open to anyone. Call 746-1269 for more information.

On July 23, a Toast to the Arts at



The 2003-4 theater board includes, from left, back row, Traci Devlin-Pruden, Valerie Macdonald; middle row Patti Wallace, Delene Warsnietz, Dyanne Vojvoda, Jeanne Maxwell; front Donna Telepak. Missing are Carlene and David Coury.

the fun on Benicia Bay will raise funds, some of which will go to BOTTG.

Auditions for Bus Stop are scheduled for Aug. 17 and 18. The play will run from Oct. 17 through Nov. 11.

BOTTG meets the first Monday of each month; invited, anyone

interested in theater to attend. There are needs for actors, backstage crew, technicians, painting, costumes, bartending, front of house and general support.

Call new president Dyanne Vojvoda at 746-5526 or 746-1269 for meeting times, locations or other information.



READERS' THEATER

2003





STAGE DOOR



STAGE DOOR



STAGE DOOR

STAGE DOOR



Torchlight Parade
July 4th
2003





2003
"BUS
STOP"
4th
July
Parade

2003
Christmas
Caroling

